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# HOW TO STUDY THE ENGLISH BIBLE



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# HOW TO STUDY THE ENGLISH BIBLE

BY

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1887

Within this ample volume lies  
The mystery of mysteries.  
Happiest they of human race  
To whom their God has given grace  
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,  
To lift the latch, to force the way ;  
And better had they ne'er been born  
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

## PREFACE.

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THIS little book is intended to supply a need felt by many students of God's Word. They have taken in the message of salvation, they have dedicated their lives to the Master, and have said to Him, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' The answer to this question lies in the Scriptures, and they have begun to read their Bible in order to learn the will of God. But they soon feel that there are two ways of reading,—a right and a wrong way; and they look out for some practical guidance which may enable them to make the best of God's Word.

The following pages are offered with a view of meeting this desire.

May God bless them to the reader's use!

R. B. G.





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# HOW TO STUDY THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE.

1. **Its Names.**—The word Bible means Book, being derived from the Greek name for the plant from which paper used to be made. The Bible is emphatically the Book, as Sir Walter Scott is reported to have said when he was dying. It contains the Old and New Testaments or Covenants, which are so called because the first portion is much occupied with the history of Israel under the Old Covenant; while the second gives an account of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish the New Covenant. This distinction is set forth in 2 Cor. iii. and Heb. viii. and x. The Bible is also called the Scriptures—*i.e.*, writings, a title given to the Old Testament by our Lord Himself, and apparently to some parts of the New Testament by St. Peter; see John v. 39, and 2 Pet. iii. 16.

2. **Its Language.**—The original tongue in which the Old Testament was written is Hebrew, the language of the children of Israel. The only exceptions are Dan. ii. 4—vii. 28, Ezra iv. 8—vi. 18, and vii. 12-26; and

Jer. x. 11, which are written in Syrian, a language nearly related to Hebrew, probably picked up by the Jews from their neighbours, in the period of the Babylonian captivity (606-536 B.C.).

The New Testament was written in Greek, a language largely used in Palestine, Egypt, and Asia Minor, as well as in Europe, in the time of our Lord and His Apostles.

**3. Its Translation.**—The Bible is said on the title page to be translated by His Majesty's special command, and compared with the former translations. His Majesty is King James I. There had already been several translations into English, notably that of John Wycliffe, made 500 years ago, before the age of printing, and those of William Tyndale, whose work was completed by Rogers,—two of the noble army of martyrs,—Myles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter, and the band of English Protestants who took refuge in Geneva in the reign of Queen Mary, and who spent their time in preparing the version now frequently called the Breeches Bible. Copies of all these may be seen in the British Museum, or the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

These, together with the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, commonly called the Septuagint, the old Latin Bible, commonly called the Vulgate (which was the first book ever printed), Luther's celebrated version, and some others, were used in the preparation of our present English Bible. The work of translating was committed to three companies of learned divines

representing London, Oxford, and Cambridge, who completed the task allotted to them in 1611.

Various attempts have been made to revise the Translation in later times, but none need be referred to here, except the Revised Bible, which was issued in 1885. This Bible was prepared by companies of learned men of various Protestant denominations, and is of very great value, not only as a book of reference when we wish to know the literal meaning of the words of Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, but also for enabling the English reader to get a much clearer idea of the meaning of such books as Job in the Old Testament, and the Epistles in the New. Other versions have been made for special objects; thus there is a Roman Catholic Bible, a Jewish version of the Old Testament, Baptist and Unitarian New Testaments, &c.

When the Bible of 1611 was first issued, it had a dedication to the king, written in the fulsome style of that period, and now wisely omitted; also a preface, in which the translators gave an interesting account of their work. This is seldom to be seen now, but it has been republished by the Church of England Book Society.

**4. Names and Order of the Books.**—The first five books of the Bible were written or compiled under the authority of Moses, the great law-giver of Israel, more than 1400 years B.C. They are usually called the Pentateuch—*i.e.*, a work in five parts. The names Genesis and Exodus are Greek, meaning beginning and departure, and give an authorised account of the

beginning of history and of the departure of Israel out of Egypt. Leviticus and Numbers are so called because they are largely taken up with the duties of the house of Levi, and the arrangement and numbering of the tribes during their time in the wilderness. Deuteronomy is a Greek word, meaning repetition of the law. The book consists of speeches delivered by Moses just before Israel went into the land of Canaan. The Jews used to name these five books after the first Hebrew word in each. The books that follow are named either after their writers or after their subject-matter. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings follow one another in historical order, and give a short account of the leading events in the history of Israel between the time of their entering Canaan and their departure into captivity. The Chronicles were written later, and recapitulate, with some additional matter, the history of the kingdom of Judah from David to Zedekiah, the last king. Ezra contains an account of the return from Babylon in the reign of Cyrus (B.C. 536), and of a second attempt at restoration or reformation made half-a-century later by Ezra himself. Nehemiah continues the narrative to about 400 B.C., and closes the Old Testament history, the Book of Esther referring probably to the age of Xerxes, 100 years earlier.

Then follow what are sometimes called the Poetical Books, from Job to the Song of Solomon; and then the Prophets, whose works, it must be remembered, are not put in chronological order, and who range from about 800 B.C. to 400 B.C.

In the New Testament we have four narratives of our

Lord's ministry, followed by a sketch of the beginnings of the Christian Church in Palestine and other countries. Then come the extant letters of the chief Apostles, and the Book of the Revelation, which contains an outline of God's purposes as they are being unrolled in history, and points to the final victory and glory of Christ.

**5. Chapters, Verses, and Headings.**—Each book is divided into chapters and verses. In the case of the Old Testament, the division into verses is very ancient, having been arranged by the Jews; but the division into chapters was borrowed by them from the Latin Bible. The New Testament was divided into chapters in the Middle Ages, and into verses in the sixteenth century. This plan is very convenient for the purpose of reference, but very inconvenient for the purpose of reading, as it frequently breaks up sentences and paragraphs which ought to be read as a whole. Some of the divisions into chapters are particularly misleading; see, for example, the separation between Josh. v. and vi., or between Hosea v. and vi.; a still more unfortunate oversight is the division between Dan. x. and xi., whereby a separation is made between one sentence and another uttered by the same person. In reading the Bible, we have constantly to be watchful against being misguided by these divisions, and it is a great help to us to read a passage, not only in an ordinary Bible, but also in the Bible Society's paragraph Bible or that issued by the Religious Tract Society.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A new edition of this great work is in preparation, which will embody the best results of the last twenty years of Biblical study.



One of the excellences of the Revised Version is that it is arranged in paragraphs. Many editions of the Bible have headings giving the contents of the chapters in pithy sentences. These are sometimes useful, but they are not part of the Scriptures, and they appear in some cases to be inaccurate. It would be more useful if each book of the Bible had a summary of its contents at the beginning.

6. **Italics.**—The reader will observe that a great many words of the Bible are printed in a thin-running type, commonly called *italics*. This kind of type is generally used to show that certain words are emphatic, but in the Bible it is used for the very opposite purpose. The languages in which the Bible was written do not express things in quite the same way as we do, and the translators were often obliged to put some additional words into the English Bible, in order to make the sense intelligible and the English readable. The celebrated Robert Boyle, in his treatise on the ‘Style of Scripture,’ pointed out that ‘the religious and just veneration’ which the translators had for the sacred text has caused them to render the Hebrew and Greek passages scrupulously word for word, for fear of not keeping close enough to the sense. Their use of italics may be instanced as a further proof of their fidelity. The following instances will show their nature:—

Gen. i. 10. ‘God saw that *it was* good.’

Gen. i. 16. ‘*He made* the stars also.’

Gen. xlix. 7. ‘Cursed *be* their anger, for *it was* fierce.’

Ps. lxxx. 1. 'Thou that dwellest *between* the cherubim.'

Num. xxiii. 15. 'Stand here while I meet *the Lord* yonder.'

Ps. iii. 8. 'Salvation *belongeth* unto the Lord.'

Ps. cxviii. 2. 'His mercy *endureth* for ever.'

Gen. xxiv. 60. 'Be thou *the mother* of thousands.'

Cases of this kind are numberless. But there are others in which the translators were obliged to exercise their judgment much more boldly, and sometimes, perhaps, they have been mistaken, as in 2 Sam. i. 18, where we should probably read '*the song of* the bow,' instead of '*the use of* the bow.' See also Job xix. 26; Ps. vii. 11 and xxxiv. 17.

We should always note in our reading the words which are put into italics—first, because they remind us that our Bible is only a translation, though a very good one; and secondly, because they help us to judge of the difference between the old languages in which the Bible was written and our own. Few persons realise the difficulties which Bible translators have to overcome.

The only other peculiarity in the printing of the Bible is that the word LORD or GOD is sometimes printed in capital letters; in which case it stands for the sacred name Jehovah, and not for the more ordinary word which signifies Master.

**7. Marginal References and Notes.**—Many Bibles have marginal references. There are about 60,000 references in ordinary editions, but not so many in Bagster's Bibles. They are very useful, as they help us to compare one passage with another. Some of them

are historical, giving us references to the same or similar events; some are doctrinal; others are verbal—*i.e.*, referring to passages where the same word is used.

Mixed up with the references we find in many Bibles a number of very short notes, about 8000 in all. These would be better printed at the foot of the page, as in the Bible Society's Paragraph Bible, otherwise they are in danger of being overlooked. They ought always to be examined by the reader. Sometimes they give a more literal interpretation of the original, as in Gen. xxxii. 24, where for 'the breaking of the day,' we read 'the ascending of the morning' (compare Job iii. 9, 'the eyelids of the morning'); again Ps. xxii. 8, 'he trusted on the Lord,' margin 'he rolled himself on the Lord;' Isa. xxvi. 4, 'everlasting strength,' margin 'Rock of ages;' Gen. viii. 21, 'a sweet savour,' margin 'a savour of rest.' Note also the 'nests' in Gen. vi. 14, and the 'tongue of fire' in Isa. v. 24. Sometimes these notes give what is called an alternative rendering—that is, a translation almost or quite as good as that in the text. Thus, against Gen. iv. 13, where we read, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear,' we find, 'Mine iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven;' and in Judges xi. 40, where we read 'that the daughters of Israel went yearly to *lament* the daughter of Jephthah,' the margin says 'to *talk with*' her. Other notes give explanations of proper names, weights, measures, and there are a few historical and geographical notes.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD.

1. **The Age and Authority of the Old Testament.**—The Bible may be regarded in two ways. First, it is a collection of ancient Jewish writings; secondly, it contains a record of sacred truth. About the first of these no one has any doubt, but the second is sometimes questioned. No study of the Bible can be satisfactorily or usefully carried on unless our minds are quite clear on this matter. The case stands simply thus:—The Old Testament, as we Christians have it, is exactly the same as that now used by the Jews, both as regards the Hebrew text and the substance of the translation. Anyone may learn this by inquiry from a Jew. Moreover, it is the same as was used in the synagogues and amongst the Jews in our Lord's own time. This may be shown both from the passages quoted from it in the New Testament, and by the statements of the Jewish writer, Josephus, who was St. Paul's contemporary, and by other Jewish testimonies. Neither Jews nor Christians have had the wish or the power to corrupt the text.

If, however, we go further back, and ask how the books which make up the Old Testament were gathered

together into one collection, so as to form what is called a canon or rule of doctrine and precept—it is hard to answer; for we have very little information on the subject. The Jews tell us that Ezra, the ready scribe in the law, associated certain persons with him, who were called the Great Synagogue, and to them he intrusted the guardianship of the sacred books. But, it may be asked, on what principle were some held sacred and some not? Were all Jewish books sacred? Certainly not. The sacredness of the book depended on the authority of the writer. Was the person who wrote such and such a book a prophet, or was he not? All hung upon that. If he was a prophet, his writing was regarded as authoritative; if he was not, his work might be interesting and valuable, but it was not canonical—not part of the divinely-ordered collection.

It may be well to note what Josephus says on this point. Among passages which might be quoted from his writings, there is one where he is defending his religion against an Egyptian named Apion, and says: ‘Every one is not permitted of his own accord to be a writer, nor is there any disagreement in what is written; they being only prophets that have written the original and earliest accounts of things as they learned them from God Himself by inspiration’ (Jos. Ap. i. 7).

Three things follow from this view of the Old Testament:—First, that its contents are true. The writers being prophets, are to be trusted. It is noteworthy that our Lord never threw doubt on a single statement of the Old Testament. He took it just as it stands, and interpreted it accordingly. In the second



place, the Book is authoritative in its teaching concerning the things of God and eternity. The words 'it is written' occur again and again in the New Testament, and always with reference to the older Scriptures, and they put an end to all controversy. Thirdly, whatever is written in the Old Testament is for man's instruction. This is implied throughout the New Testament, and is said in so many words by St. Paul, Rom. xv. 4; 1 Cor. x. 11; 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

The books found in some Bibles after the Old Testament, and which are commonly called the Apocrypha, are not in the Hebrew Bible; they are never quoted as authoritative by our Lord or His Apostles; and they are not regarded as of authority by the Jews.

## **2. The Age and Authority of the New Testament.**

—The case of the New Testament is not quite the same as that of the Old. It is disregarded by the Jews; it was not spoken of, as a whole collection, by our Lord, who ascended into heaven before any of it was written; and yet we have ample reason for regarding it as on a level with the Old Testament. First, we can trace the history and use of most of the books back to the generation succeeding the age of the Apostles. Secondly, we find that these books were received as authoritative by the early Christians. Thirdly, we have satisfactory evidence that almost all of them were written by our Lord's personal followers, and some of them by Apostles. We accept the four Gospels on this class of evidence as giving a trustworthy account of the

life and teaching of Christ; and in studying His recorded utterances and deeds, we find some which justify us in viewing the writings of His first followers in the same light as we are taught by Him to view the Old Testament—viz., as true, as authoritative, and as written for our learning, or—to put it in one word—as inspired.

**3. The Bible inspired.**—The word inspiration is used in several senses, and for various purposes. It may be sufficient to define it here as the action of the Spirit of God on the spirit of man, enabling him to carry out some Divine purpose. Every Christian is inspired, that he may live a Divine life; every prophet was inspired, that he might utter Divine truth. God said to Moses, 'I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' *Exod. iv. 12*; and to Jeremiah, 'I have put My words in thy mouth,' *Jer. i. 9*; and in this way a prophet was able to begin his words with the solemn 'Thus saith the Lord,' and to speak in the first person words which were not his, but God's.

Similarly we understand that every sacred writer was inspired to remember, to select, and to record certain things, which God in His wisdom saw to be profitable or needful for the spiritual instruction of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.

It is true, we have not the original autographs of the sacred writers. No doubt the books of the Bible have suffered somewhat through their being copied and re-copied by many hands during the many ages through which they have been transmitted. Copyists,

and even printers, make mistakes, however much they may try to guard against them; translators may have misunderstood the text, and may have given wrong renderings here and there; but after making all due allowance for these things, the fact remains indubitable that we have the highest authority—that of the Lord Jesus Christ—for regarding the whole Bible as the inspired word of God, and consequently as absolutely binding upon us.

Robert Boyle says: ‘When I find anything enjoined in Scripture, I then leave roving, and see where to cast anchor; I think it my part, without disputing thereon, to obey His orders; and acquiesce more in that imperious “Thus saith the Lord” than in a whole dialogue of Plato, or an epistle of Seneca. I love to build my ethics as well as my creed upon the Rock; and esteeming nothing but the true, proper, and strict sense of the Scripture, and what is convincingly deducible from it, to be obligatory either as to faith or practice, it is no wonder if I study God’s will most in that Book wherein alone I think it revealed.’

#### **4. Scripture adapted to the Mind of Man.—**

A word must here be said about what is sometimes called Accommodation. We most of us feel, when we think the matter out, that human beings may be and have been influenced or inspired to utter Divine truths; but after all, it may be said, the words are human, and the idioms, the grammar, the illustrations, the modes of thought are human; so that the truth comes to us through an imperfect medium, and thus,

it may be thought, we must deduct a great deal because of the inadequacy of the instrument through which it is conveyed. Moreover, some might think the people for whom the Scriptures were originally written were much less enlightened than we are, and if prophets were to arise now and set forth Divine Truth they would put it in a very different way from that which suited the rude and uncultivated mind of the children of Israel and their descendants, the Jews.

The answer to these suggestions is that all revelation contained in Scripture is certainly accommodated to our limited understandings, and was primarily adapted to the requirements of the age and the people who first received it. When our Lord was upon earth, He daily adapted Himself to man's imperfect notions and ways; nay, more, in a certain sense the whole Gospel scheme is adapted or accommodated to Israelite and Jewish modes of thought. In fact, it is a mere truism to affirm that the language in which Divine truth is expressed, and the forms under which it is conveyed, are suited to the wants and capacities of man in general, and of the Jew in particular. But, on the other hand, we must bear in mind—First, that the Jews and their ancestors the Israelites got their modes of thought from God Himself. Judaism is confessedly not the result of human invention but of Divine revelation. Secondly, man is made in the image of God, and though fallen, is capable of receiving true and adequate, though limited ideas concerning his Maker. Thirdly, God has, in His love and wisdom, devised a special means of guarding us against any

misconception of truth, by employing various means of communication and several modes of expression. Just as our various senses, though each imperfect, are effectual to convey a real impression of the outside world by their joint operation, so the divers methods and many instrumentalities by which God has spoken to man enable us to check our first impressions, to enlarge our views of Divine things, to widen the horizon of truth, and to attain adequate convictions of things unseen and eternal.

What one writer puts in figure, another puts in plain words; what one expresses in prose, another sings in poetry; whilst one prophet sets forth the goodness of God, another may dilate on His severity; if one Apostle dwells on the efficacy of faith, another points out the need of the spirit of love, and a third reminds us that faith and love are mere shams if they do not produce fruit; if one Evangelist conveys to us an impression of the Deity of Christ, another brings out by touch after touch His humanity. And so Scripture, if studied as a whole, is an adequate revelation of the mind of God, many members in one body, no two having the same office, but all contributing to one grand end—the setting forth of Truth.

The late Edward Irving writes thus of Scripture as a completed Revelation:—‘The miracles of God have ceased, and Nature, secure and unmolested, is no longer called on for testimonies to her Creator’s voice. No burning bush draws the footsteps to His presence-chamber; no invisible voice holds the ear awake; no hand cometh forth from the obscure to write His



purposes in letters of flame. The vision is shut up and the testimony is sealed, and the word of the Lord is ended; and this solitary volume, with its chapters and verses, is the sum total of all for which the chariot of heaven made so many visits to the earth, and the Son of God Himself tabernacled and dwelt among us.' After lamenting that this Book, the offspring of the Divine mind, and the perfection of heavenly wisdom, should be so much neglected, he breaks out into this solemn apostrophe:—'Oh! if books had but tongues to speak their wrongs, then might this Book exclaim, Hear, O Heaven, and give ear, O Earth! I came from the love and embrace of God, and my words were to the children of men. I disclosed to you the mysteries of hereafter, and the secrets of the throne of God. I set open to you the gates of salvation and the way of eternal life heretofore unknown. But ye requited me with no welcome, ye held no festivity on my arrival. Ye sequester me from happiness and heroism, closeting me with sickness and infirmity. Ye use me not as your guide to wisdom and prudence, but press me into your list of duties, and withdraw me to a mere corner of your time.'

## CHAPTER III.

### THE BIBLE DEMANDS STUDY.

1. **Bible Difficulties.**—Sufficient, it is hoped, has been said to make us feel convinced that the Bible is stamped with Divine authority, and that it conveys the mind of God to man in methods wisely adapted to all our needs. The practical conclusion is that its contents deserve and demand our reverent attention and our deepest thought. It is not to be preserved as an heirloom or talisman, or as an old sheathed sword hung up on our walls, but is to be read and used.

Yes, says some one, I read it every day. But ‘How readest thou?’ Do we search the Scripture as for hidden treasures? Do we mark, learn, and inwardly digest, as well as read? Have we ever awakened to the serious difficulty of the task? There are some who glide calmly through their Bible, chapter by chapter, without realising that there are any difficulties in it at all; whilst others are so perplexed when they venture to dive beneath the surface, that they give up the whole pursuit in despair. Let us fairly ask ourselves, What are the classes of difficulties which we meet with in the Bible, and in what spirit and method are they to be faced?

Our difficulties arise largely from the fact that the Bible was written in the East, in languages very different from our own, in remote ages, by a people whose ideas differ widely from ours. It contains many words so rare and strange that, with all their research, our most learned scholars are not quite sure of their meaning. It mentions persons and places with which we are not familiar, and some of which are not mentioned in any other literature. It abounds in brief allusions to events and customs of which we know nothing, or next to nothing. It frequently uses figures and illustrations which must have been clear enough to the people for whom the Book was originally intended, but which are by no means clear to a modern Englishman, who loses in consequence much of the esteem, delight, and relish with which he should read.

Another class of difficulties arises from the fact that the Scriptures teach truths which are above our comprehension—truths relating to the nature of God, to His work, and to the things of the eternal and spiritual world.

Again, the Bible contains precepts difficult to adjust to our own times and states of society, and some of them not in harmony with the moral standard of Christianity.

Further, a large portion of the Bible is prophetic, and is so expressed that we are unable to picture to ourselves a clear idea of the events which must surely come to pass. There is a passage in Robert Boyle's work on Scripture well worth citing in this connection. He says: 'As some portions of Scripture

were principally designed for ages very long since past, so some other parts of it, especially those that are yet prophetic, may probably respect future times much more than ours; and our posterity may admire what we cannot now relish because we do not yet understand it. . . . There may be parts of Scripture whose clear expositions shall ennoble and bless the remotest of succeeding ages, and perhaps some mysteries are so obscure that they are reserved to the illumination and blaze of the last and universal fire.' And again, 'some passages will not be found useful for these many ages, being possibly reserved by the prophetic spirit that indited them (and whose omniscience comprises and unites in one prospect all times and all events) to quell some foreseen heresy which will not perhaps be born till we be dead, or to resolve some yet unformed doubt, or confound some error that hath not yet a name.'

Once more, the difficulty lies partly in ourselves, in our dull understandings and hard hearts, and in our disinclination to receive God's Word and yield to His call. 'To minds untuned to holiness the words of God find no entrance—striking heavy on the ear, seldom making way to the understanding, almost never to the heart. To spirits hot with conversation, perhaps heady with argument, uncomposed by solemn thought, ruffled and in uproar from the concourse of worldly interests, the sacred page being spread out, its accents are drowned in the noise which hath not yet subsided within the breast. All the awe and pathos and awakened consciousness of a Divine approach — impressed

upon the ancients by the procession of solemnities—is to worldly men without a substitute. They have not solicited themselves to be in readiness. In a usual mood, and in a vulgar frame of mind, they come to God's Word as to any other composition, feeling no awe of a sovereign Lord, nor care of a tender Father, nor devotion to a merciful Saviour. With no fervent ejaculation of welcome, as Samuel's "Speak, for Thy servant heareth," they come to the Word feeling towards it as the word of an equal.' (Irving).

It is evident that all these facts must be faced and provided for. On the one hand, we must not read our Bible as if it were an English book written yesterday. Imagine an early English chronicle, part of the Domesday Book, some of Chaucer's Tales, a play of Shakespeare, an essay by Milton, a sermon by South, some of Lord Chesterfield's letters, and a sketch by Macaulay, put together into one book, and translated into one of the South Sea Island languages for the benefit of the islanders 2000 years hence, and all divided up into chapters and verses. This gives by no means an exaggerated idea of the literary difficulties to be contended with in studying the Bible.

On the other hand, we must never approach the Book without recognition of its unique position as God's Word. 'With no less emotion,' says Edward Irving, 'should this Book be opened than if, like him in the Apocalypse, you saw the voice which spake, or, like him in the trance, you were into the third heaven translated, communing with the realities of glory which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.'



2. **All has a Meaning and Purpose.**—It has been suggested by an able scholar in our own day that we should begin by being sure that we know nothing. There is sound wisdom in this advice, but let a more encouraging precept be laid down—begin by being convinced that all Scripture has a meaning. ‘The natural powers of man,’ says Irving, ‘are to be mistrusted, doubtless, as the willing instruments of the Evil One; but they must be honoured also as the necessary instruments of the Spirit of God, whose operation is a dream if it be not through knowledge, intellect, conscience, and action.’ Every book, chapter, and verse was written by a man of intelligence, who said what he meant, and meant what he said. Understandest thou what thou readest? We ought to try at any rate. We must weigh the words, and resolve to find out their meaning if possible. Ignorance of Scripture was regarded as a fault by our Lord. The Church of Rome practically incurs our Lord’s rebuke, for she will not trust the Scriptures in the hands of her laity, and has positively affirmed that the indiscriminate circulation of the Scriptures does more harm than good. Instead of fostering the study of Scripture, she discourages it. The Church of England has made a noble stand against this error in her First Homily, and it is for us to hold to the position so nobly won for us at the Reformation.

Again, everything in Scripture has a purpose; and it is our business to try and find it out. Nothing is put in to puzzle us. There is no waste in Scripture. All things are not equally necessary for all persons and times, but all things have their use. Genealogies, lists

of names, repetitions, little incidents mentioned by the wayside, are so many links in the chain of history and of Providence, valuable for the Jew, and not devoid of interest to the Gentile. After making due allowance for different readings in the old manuscripts, and for different ways of expressing the same thing and even spelling the same name, we come back to this—that God has overruled the writing, compilation, and preservation of the whole for His own purposes.

**3. The Need of Prayer.**—We must enter upon our work in a spirit of prayer. The heart needs to be opened and the mind enlightened by Him ‘who spake by the Scriptures.’ If the Bible contains messages from our Father, we need a filial spirit, and we must seek it humbly and believingly, for we have ample encouragement to do so in His Word. He is revealed as the Father of Lights, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not (Jas. i. 5, 17), and we are told, on the highest authority, that He will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. We cannot tell in what exact way Christ opened men’s understanding in old time that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke xxiv. 45), but that same way must be available still, and we may go boldly to the throne of grace and ask for help. We need a candid mind; we need a thirst for truth; we need an unprejudiced heart and a spirit of unreserved submission; we need quickness of discernment, judgment in the application of precepts, patience in dealing with difficulties. All these things God is prepared to give us; and the

more we use what we have, the more He will give.

Augustine gives the following precepts to the student (Christian Doctrine, ii. 7):—Fear God, and seek to know His will; do not run in the face of Scripture when it strikes at your sins; be guided by the truth that God is to be loved for His own sake, and man for God's sake; pray for strength and resolution that your heart may be fixed on things eternal; devote yourself to good works; and die to the world that you may see God.

**4. Definiteness of Object in Study.**—In taking up any book, sacred or secular, we ought to ask ourselves, What is my object? Am I seeking amusement or instruction? Am I going to criticise or to learn? Have I a literary object or a spiritual? If the Bible is what we have seen it to be—the world's lesson-book in spiritual things—our purpose in reading it should be threefold:—First, in order to get at the facts; in other words, we must study historically. Secondly, in order to get at the Divine truths, we must study doctrinally. Thirdly, in order to get at the precepts, we must study practically. We may always put two questions concerning any passage which we read—What does it teach me about God and His ways? What about man and his ways? This second question is only next in importance to the first. For, if the Bible is a telescope whereby we may gaze into the spiritual world and the things of Christ, it is also a looking-glass, wherein we may see our nature reflected in its true colours; and we have to face the truth about

human nature in order that we may appreciate the revelation of God's redeeming work in Christ.

'I can scarce think any pains misspent,' says Boyle, 'that brings me in solid evidences of that great truth that the Scripture is the Word of God; and I use the Scripture not as an arsenal to be resorted to only for arms and weapons to defend this party or defeat its enemies, but as a matchless temple, where I delight to be, to contemplate the beauty, the symmetry, and the magnificence of the structure, and to increase my awe and excite my devotion to the Deity there preached and adored.'

## CHAPTER IV.

### RULES FOR STUDYING THE BIBLE.

1. **Get an idea of the Bible as a whole.**—The best way to begin the study of geography is to get a good look at a globe. It enables one to see the proportions of sea and land, the main outlines of continents, and the relative sizes and positions of various countries. So we ought to get a 'Pisgah view' of the Bible, and this ought to be done, not from an analysis, but from the Book itself. It will take some time, but in the long run this preliminary rapid reading of the Bible will prove serviceable. We have to deal with sixty-six books by some forty different authors, ranging from about B.C. 1500 to A.D. 70; we have to study history, law, poetry, letters; we have to dive into the writings of kings, priests, princes, shepherds, fishermen; and we need to get a bird's-eye view of the whole in order to give to each book its due position.

In spite of the variety of style and contents, we speedily find, as we read the whole through—whether we take a week, a month, or a year about it—that the Book is indeed one. It is the work, in the main if not entirely, of men of one nation. It is written by Israel, for Israel, and about Israel. We thus get an impression



that the doings of this people, and God's dealing with them, are intended to be the medium whereby the world is to be instructed and restored. Again, whilst an Israelite literature, it sets forth all truth, whether physical, historical, or spiritual, in God's name; it is written by God to effect God's purposes, and to plant true godliness in men's hearts. All subjects are treated from a Divine point of view, everything is attributed to God—whether creation, natural order, moral law, natural and individual prosperity or calamity. In all these things, God is the actor. If a man's heart is hardened or opened, God is the doer of it. Good and evil are from Him. There may be processes, as when man was created from dust, or when an east wind brought locusts, but these are usually omitted; it is enough to know that He is the source of all power, physical, mental, moral. Long periods may have been occupied in some of these processes, as when a mighty wind blew 'all that day and all that night' before Israel crossed the Red Sea. But it is not the object of the writers usually to chronicle these periods, whether in relation to the preparation of earth for man, or in reference to the various stages of human history. Centuries, and perhaps much longer periods, are passed over without a word. The everlasting God faints not nor is wearied. Events far distant from one another on the circumference of history are equally near Him in Whom all live, move, and have their being.

Again, a rapid reading deepens our conviction of the truth of the old saying, that all roads in the Bible lead to Christ. The Pentateuch is expectant of Canaan;

the historical books that follow give a disappointing view of the period of occupation, when judges were raised up and kings ruled; but the Psalms and prophets lift up one's sinking heart and point to a brighter prospect, both spiritual and material, and to a better King and more permanent Kingdom, in which the old promise made to Abraham should be fulfilled. The New Testament opens with the first coming of the King. We learn His nature, His character, His work, and see the outlines of the Kingdom traced out before He is withdrawn from view. Then comes the Apostolic age, which might be called the ushering in of the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, and the bright prospect emphatically set forth through the last part of the Bible, that the King is coming again and His Kingdom to be established in righteousness and in permanence. Thus, as the Old Testament left the Jew waiting for the coming of Christ, the New Testament leaves us waiting for His final triumph, and guarantees it by the two great events it records—the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Holy Ghost.

**2. Read each Book as a whole.**—After the student has patiently, watchfully and prayerfully read the Bible through, in as short a time as possible, he singles out a book which he resolves to study,—perhaps a Gospel, or perhaps the Book of Genesis. His first business will be to read it through from beginning to end, and if it is an argumentative book, such as an Epistle, he had better read it two or three times before going into details, noting but not pausing over things which strike

him on the way. This is the plan recommended by the celebrated John Locke, and it is certainly most helpful. It enables us to get the drift and tendency and spirit of a book. It makes us at home with the writer, and gives us familiarity with his mind and style. No two writers are in all respects alike, and no two books have exactly the same object. Some write in prose, others in poetry. It is estimated that a third of the Old Testament is poetry—not indeed rhyme or metre, but a balancing or parallelism of thought, as we can see for ourselves when we read the Psalms and prophets in a paragraph Bible.

The sacred books are like chambers in a well-arranged house; each has its place and function. We enter through the portal of Genesis,—magnificent in its simplicity; as we advance, we find pictures of the patriarchal period; presently we find ourselves in an Egyptian hall, which opens out into the wilderness; but anon we have passed through chambers devoted to ritual or the study of law; then we enter the armoury of Joshua, and the tapestried chambers of the kings, and so we pass from court to court, till we find ourselves in the presence-chamber of the Saviour; how different from what we might have expected beforehand; what humble occupations, but what busy scenes; how we pass from light to dark, and then to light again.

Genesis may be called a book of beginnings; Exodus, of redemption; Leviticus, of sacrifice; Numbers, of order; Deuteronomy, of practical life. The historical books set forth God in history; Job reminds us how

unsearchable are His ways in nature and providence. The Psalms guide our devotion; the Proverbs give precepts of wisdom; the prophets preach with one voice on the text, 'Return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee.' Again, each prophet has his special features; each illustrates from the scenes amidst which he was brought up. Amos is an agriculturist, but Daniel dwells among kings; one is sublime, another pathetic, a third ideal; one preaches restitution, whilst another is heavy with the thought of retribution. All of them are quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword; and all of them are pioneers, clearing the way for the Saviour. In the New Testament, each Gospel has its peculiar portraiture of Christ; the Acts sketch the founding of the Church; the Epistles show how to apply Christian truth to the needs of daily life; and the Apocalypse takes us to the end of time, and opens to us the door of heaven.

Robert Boyle has thus written on this subject:—  
'Those must derogate hugely from Scripture who only consider the sense of the particular sections or even books of it; for, as in a lovely face, though the eye, the nose, the lips, and the other parts singly looked on may beget delight and deserve praise, yet the whole face must necessarily lose much by not being seen all together; so, though the severed leaves and portions of Scripture do in themselves sufficiently betray their heavenly extraction, yet he that shall attentively survey that whole body of canonical writings which we now call the Bible, may discern so admirable a contexture and disposition, as may manifest the Book to be the work of Him who

composed the book of nature and contrived the vast fabric of the world.'

**3. Read each Book in the light of its Age.**—It is a good plan to study chronologically. This does not mean that we are necessarily to begin with Genesis and go straight through,—a course which would debar us from the study of the New Testament for many years. Rather it means that we should read each book in the light of the period in which it was written, getting all the information we can concerning the author, and reading his other writings alongside of that which we are specially studying. It is the fashion now, and a very good one, to study certain epochs or central periods of history; and we can well apply this method to the Bible.

Thus we should take together, as far as possible, the history and the poetry of David; the history of the Kings from Uzziah's time, together with the contemporary group of prophets—Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, Joel, Amos; the period immediately preceding the captivity together with Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah; the captivity itself with Daniel; and the post-captivity period with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

So, in the New Testament, it is well to take together St. Peter's speeches and letters; St. Paul's history and letters; St. John's Gospel and letters.

We have constantly to bear in mind that the so-called historical writers in the Bible (whom the Jews more properly call Prophets) do not profess to give us continuous history. They only give selections,



part of which were taken from 'the chronicles of the kings of Israel;' moreover, they do not always follow an exact chronological order. Thus the last chapters of Judges and the Book of Ruth refer to a period much earlier than that in which they stand; and so, in the New Testament, the Evangelists depart sometimes from historical order, in order to put certain incidents or teachings side by side for our instruction.

#### 4. Read each verse in the light of the Context.—

In order to ascertain the meaning of any written statement, whether secular or sacred, we must read each sentence in the light of its context—*i.e.*, of the neighbouring sentences. In the Bible we ought to study passages rather than verses. The length of a 'passage' varies according to circumstances, and it may not be always easy to say where one passage ends and another begins. The sectional marks in some Bibles (¶) may help us, and the division into paragraphs and sub-paragraphs ought to make the matter clear, and where this is not the case, practice and the use of our common-sense will generally enable us to decide.

The advantages of this method of study are manifold. First, it usually enables us to see clearly who is the speaker or actor in each passage. It may be God, or it may be a prophet, or it may be an ordinary man; the view expressed may be inspired, or it may simply be the belief at the period. One of the first questions we ask concerning any statement recorded in the Bible is, Who makes it? Its influence on our life will vary according to the answer.

Again, the studying of the context enables us to see whether the statement contained in a verse or fragment of a verse is conditional or unconditional, or whether it needs to be qualified by the circumstances under which it is uttered. There is a little sentence familiar in many quarters, taken from Matt. xviii.—viz., ‘Hear the Church.’ The words are our Lord’s, but they are not a round order to the laity to listen to the clergy. The context shows that it is a matter of disagreement between two brothers, which is to be brought in the last resort before the Church—*i.e.*, the community or congregation with which the contending parties are supposed to be connected. Again, there is a well-known book entitled ‘The Restitution of all Things.’ There is, of course, no harm in taking such a title, but it is well to look at the words in their context (Acts iii. 21), in order to find their true meaning. Thus, we learn that it is not the restitution of all things generally—a sort of universalism—which St. Peter is speaking of, but a special restitution predicted by the ancient prophets; this leads us to search into the prophecies for particulars as to this restitution. Again, no text is more familiar, and few have been more blessed than that which we read in 1 John i. 7, which is usually quoted thus:—‘The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.’ But, on turning to the passage, we find the little word ‘if’ introduced. It runs thus:—‘If we walk in the light, . . . the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.’ It implies that we have already come to the light, and are walking in the light, so that we are like the man who has bathed and

needeth not save to wash his feet (John xiii.). Again, the study of the context will keep us from misapplying a text, or throwing its force into the wrong direction. Thus, in Phil. ii: 12, there is an oft-quoted sentence: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.' Preachers are in the habit of dwelling on the apparent inconsistency between the two halves of the passage, and they argue from it that we cannot reconcile the doctrine of free will with Divine influence. But take a step further back, and the passage reads thus: 'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation, for,' &c.,—in other words, 'Depend not on me, but on God; I cannot do for you (whether present or absent), what He can.'

**5. Examine the Meaning of the Words.**—Words are little things, but they are not to be despised. A little key opens a precious casket, and a little coin will purchase what may save a life; and so, a little word may suggest a world of meaning, or become the turning-point of a destiny. It has been said that words are finite, whilst the things which they represent are infinite. That is true; but we cannot get at the infinite truth except through finite words. Bible words need to be carefully studied and well weighed; their usage must be mastered, and we must be prepared to give 'small change' for them, that is, to translate them into the language of our present daily life.

But it may be said that, as our Bible is only a translation we must not press its words too far. This is true. Yet the Bible is a very good translation, and if we read the Revised Version along with the Authorised, we shall never go very far wrong, and even without the help of the Revision we may safely lean upon the English Bible in all practical matters; and it is with reference to these that the following hints are offered:—

(1.) Many words have several shades of meaning. It has been said that the most notable words of the New Testament have a Biblical, an ecclesiastical, and a colloquial sense. At any rate, we should be watchful and raise the question—In what sense is this word used? Thus, ‘life’ may mean the course of life, the occupation of life, or the source of life, and may be used of vegetable, animal, or spiritual life. The same is true of death. The last words of Luke xv. run thus—‘This my son was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.’ It is manifestly not the ordinary death that is here referred to. Again, ‘a day’ does not always mean twenty-four hours. It may be a period of any extent. One of God’s days may be a thousand years. We have to remember this when we are studying such subjects as the creative days or the Day of Judgment. A ‘generation’ in Scripture does not necessarily mean a period of thirty years. It may mean a hundred years (see Gen. xiv. 16), or it may mean a particular nationality or class of people (see Matt. xvii. 17, and xxiv. 34). ‘A week,’ in the same manner, may signify a week of years (compare Lev. xxv. 8 with Dan. ix. 24).



It occasionally happens that the same verse may contain a word used in two senses. Thus, our Lord says, 'Let the dead bury their dead' (Matt. viii. 22), and contrasts two kinds of 'water' in John iv. 14; and so in the Fourth Commandment, our seventh day of rest is ordered to be in correspondence with God's seventh day.

(2.) The English Bible contains some archaic or old-fashioned words, which need to be remembered. Sometimes they may be merely matters of spelling, such as straw for strew, pill for peel, peep for pipe, chapiter for capital. In other cases, the word is changed to a greater degree, as when we read of 'tiring the head' for attiring, 'table' and 'writing-table' for tablet, 'artillery' for archery, 'untempered mortar' for distemper. Or the word in its old sense has more or less gone out of use, as 'earring the ground' for ploughing, 'nephew' for grandson, 'carriage' for burden, 'prevent' for anticipate, 'champaign' for plain, 'chapman' for tradesman, 'governor' for pilot, 'by-and-by' for immediately, 'presently,' for immediately, 'quick' for alive.

(3.) Some words are ambiguous. Thus, when we read (Gen. xxxii. 31) that Jacob 'halted,' we are to understand that he limped; and when the question is asked, 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' (1 Kings xviii. 21), it means, How long do you keep springing from opinion to opinion? It was the people's fickleness, not their hesitation, which was called in question. So, in the use of the word 'flood,' we have to distinguish between the 'waters of Noah,' and the flood or



inundation of the Nile (Amos viii. 8), and the rivers of Mesopotamia (Josh. xxiv. 14). The English Bible has many such ambiguities.

(4.) Words indicating relationship do not always signify what we Englishmen mean by them. A 'father' may be what we call a grandfather, or even a remote ancestor; as when the Jews said to our Lord, 'We have Abraham for our father.' So, a son may be a grandson; thus Jehu, who is called the son of Nimshi (2 Kings ix. 20), was really his grandson. An 'only son' may mean the only son of the same mother as well as father (Gen. xxii. 1), and one may be called a son who is only so by adoption or royal succession, as when Christ is called Joseph's son (compare 1 Chron. iii. 16 with the 15th verse).

(5.) Once more, there are words which have lost some of their old width and strength, having been toned down by modern use. Some have an offensive sense now, such as 'damnation,' 'lust,' 'vengeance;' others suggest a tamer idea than the old one, as in the case of 'offence,' 'edification;' or a more earthly short-sighted idea, as in the case of health and wealth and comfort. Others again are reduced in force through the circumstances of our earthly life; thus, if we say 'help me,' we mean that we want only a little assistance, but in the Bible 'help me' means 'save me,' or 'do everything for me;' so to 'hope' and to 'believe' in ordinary English frequently imply some uncertainty, as when we say, 'I hope he will come,' or 'I believe he will come,' but there is no element of uncertainty in the hope and faith of the Bible.

It is only as we read more widely and more watchfully that we get at the full usage of Bible words ; and what is true of words is true also of idioms. Such recurring expressions as to lift the hand (*i.e.*, to swear), to shed blood (*i.e.*, to slay), to call upon the name of the Lord (*i.e.*, to worship), are often read by us without our giving them that due weight which Biblical usage demands.

**6. Compare Scripture with Scripture.** — The Bible is the best commentary on itself. We can best explain hard texts in the light of easy ones, short texts in the light of those which expand a subject, allusions in the light of direct statements. For this purpose, a trained memory is most helpful ; and one part of Scripture which we may come across in our daily reading, may, in the most unexpected way, throw light on a hard passage in a distant part of the Bible. God, who fashioneth all hearts alike, has given to all the sacred writers the same spirit, and thus they incidentally, or, as we might say, accidentally, illustrate one another's meaning.

The parallel passages in reference Bibles are very helpful, but they must be read watchfully. Putting aside purely verbal references, there remain the two great classes, historical and doctrinal. Under the first are included casual references to the history of by-gone times, as when Isaiah (ix. 4) refers to 'the day of Midian;' or to laws and rites, as in 2 Kings iii. 20, where we have the reference to the time of the daily morning offering, and chap. iv. 23, where the feasts of the new moon and Sabbath are casually mentioned.

Some references are more formal, as in 1 Sam. xv. 2 where God says, 'I remember that which Amalek did to Israel.' There are thousands of such links between book and book.

The doctrinal references are in some respects still more important. When we read some statement of truth which appears either difficult to receive or very important in its bearing on life and thought, having first assured ourselves by the study of the context that it is really a message from God, and having examined as far as possible the usage of the words, we ask ourselves whether there is anything like it elsewhere, either in the same book or in some other part of the Bible. Scripture not only confirms Scripture, but also guides and checks us in interpreting. When Satan said to Christ, 'It is written,' Christ replied, 'It is written again,' and the passage which He quoted affirms a general principle which qualifies the interpretation of the passage which Satan quoted. Our Lord once said, 'How hardly shall they that *have* riches enter into the kingdom,' but immediately afterwards He qualified it thus, 'How hardly shall they that *trust* in riches enter.' Salvation is made to depend on belief in Jesus Christ, in the 16th of the Acts, but on confession that God had raised Him from the dead, in the 10th of the Romans. Entrance into the kingdom involves new birth, in the 3rd of St. John; but it involves a righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees, in the 5th of St. Matthew. St. Paul says in one passage that what is needful is not circumcision nor uncircumcision, but 'a new creature' (Gal. vi. 15); in another place, he substitutes

for a new creature 'faith which worketh by love' (Gal. v. 6); and yet in another, 'the keeping of the commandments of God' (1 Cor. vii. 19). Our Lord says, 'Ask, and ye shall receive;' St. James says, 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.' 'Seek, and ye shall find;' but Moses (and his words are echoed by Jeremiah), says we must seek with our whole heart. 'Knock, and it shall be opened;' but a time will come when men will knock in vain. Once more, our Lord says that the believer is passed from death unto life (John v. 24), but St. John, taking up this last expression, applies it to one who loves his brother (1 John iii. 14).

By thus comparing different inspired teachers, we get not only several witnesses to the same truth, but several aspects of truth. A celebrated Jew, named Rabbi Ishmael, once gave thirteen rules for interpreting Scripture, which are almost all in harmony with the subject now before us; but he closes with this interesting rule, 'When two texts contradict one another, a third will be found to reconcile them.' This we believe to be true also.

The parallels in the Gospels are of special interest. We often find the same incidents with slightly different details, and the same teaching under quite different circumstances, and by comparing them we get further insight into the truth as it is in Jesus.

'The books of Scripture,' says Boyle, 'illustrate and expound each other; Genesis and the Apocalypse are in some things reciprocal commentaries; as in the mariner's compass the needle's extremity, though it



seem to point purposely but at the north, doth yet at the same time discover both east and west, so do some texts of Scripture guide us to the intelligence of others from which they are widely distant in the Bible, and seem so in the sense.'

**7. Study the Quotations.**—There is a difference between a reference and a quotation. When our Lord said, 'Remember Lot's wife,' He made a reference; but when He said, 'Have you never read, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is made the head of the corner,' He made a quotation. There are three classes of quotations in the Bible. First may be mentioned those which are made from secular or uninspired sources, such as the extracts from the Persian archives in Ezra vi., the verse from Menander in 1 Cor. xv. 33, and from Epimenides in Titus i. 12. Secondly, there are numerous passages from the earlier parts of the Old Testament quoted by later writers. Thus Joshua makes quotation from the Pentateuch, the Book of Judges contains extracts from Joshua, the Kings from Deuteronomy, the Chronicles has a large quantity of matter in common with Samuel and the Kings. Some Psalms are to be found also in the historical books, whilst others quote passages from the Pentateuch and Judges; Isaiah and Micah have passages in common; Joel, Amos, and Obadiah are linked together by identical sentences; Jeremiah draws quotations from most of his predecessors, and he and his contemporary Ezekiel quote the same proverb, as in common use in their time. In Ezra and Nehemiah we



have extracts from the law; Daniel cites Jeremiah; and Zephaniah and Zechariah quote passages more or less directly from Isaiah. Enough has hardly been made of these interesting phenomena. It would seem that many of the sacred writers were well acquainted with the works of their predecessors, and often, perhaps unconsciously, clothed their thoughts in words already committed to writing. We need not be surprised, for example, to find Jacob's blessing quoted by Moses when his turn comes to bless the tribes, or to find expressions from the great prophetic chapters of the Pentateuch, Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii., xxix., and xxxii., frequently dropping from the lips of the prophets; but it is touching to find David giving a charge to Solomon in words borrowed from Moses' charge to Joshua; to find Hezekiah exhorting the people of Judah, at a critical moment, in words first used in the great crisis of Israel's history when they came out of Egypt; and to find Micah, who lived near the Philistine border, citing a line from David's lament over Saul and Jonathan.

The third class of quotations includes the large number of passages of the Old Testament, six hundred in all, which reappear in the New. No less than eighty-five Psalms, and fifty out of the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah, are quoted in the New Testament. Five-sixths of Stephen's speech is, in a literal sense, a 'mosaic.' The Epistle to the Hebrews, the argumentative, or Jewish portions of the Epistle to the Romans, bristle with quotations. The Apocalypse reproduces the visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, and projects their prophecies into the still more distant

future. In fact, the whole of the New Testament breathes with the words, figures, ideas, types, history, and doctrine of the older Scriptures.

It is interesting to find two Apostles quoting the same text (see Jas. iv. 6 and 1 Pet. v. 5), or one sacred writer quoting half a verse, and another the other half (John ii. 17 and Rom. xv. 3); and to find our Lord and His authorised followers going to the same Psalm or chapter for the same purpose.

The more one studies the use of the Old Testament in the New, the more one will be struck with the fact that all New Testament writers use the Old Testament in the same way. They seem to have all learnt from one Teacher how to expound the Scriptures, and they confidently use the method thus acquired both to teach positive truth and to pull down the strongholds of error. It is easy for us to discern who the Teacher was from Whom they drew their inspiration. When we come to a quotation, we should always hunt it up in order to see the way in which it is written, and also the context in its original place. Sometimes we shall be puzzled, owing to the fact that the Hebrew reading may be a little different, or the translation not quite the same, and we shall have in such cases to get the help of books of reference; but the searching into the Old in the light of the New is almost as valuable as the opposite process. It also helps us if we bear in mind that the New Testament quotations are sometimes taken from the Septuagint.

There is a fulness and richness of meaning in the Old which we only get out by studying the New. Supposing,

for example, we were engaged on Gen. iv., and questioning as to Cain's bloody deed, we ask, Wherefore did he slay Abel? St. John answers (1 John iii. 12), 'because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous;' and if we proceed to ask in what that righteousness consisted, the answer is given in the 11th of the Hebrews, where we are told that by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Who would have seen the depth of meaning in the word 'pilgrimage' in Genesis, or of the expression, 'I am the God of Abraham,' in Exodus, or of the words, 'I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son,' in Samuel, had we not the inspired light of the New Testament thrown on these apparently simple statements?

**8. Take Notice of Small Details.**—Whilst wholesale reading is an excellent preliminary to study, we should also cultivate habits of thorough accuracy, both in reading and in quoting sentences of Scripture. Texts are often misquoted, as well as misapplied, simply through our taking them second-hand, or through our lack of concentration in study. We ought to give our whole attention to reading, for the Bible is like a legal document, and a great deal depends on its right interpretation; nothing ought to escape our notice. There are no excrescences in Scripture. God is a good architect, and the ornaments He has introduced into His Word are part of the structure. We need a trained eye, a habit of noticing what is put in, and also what is left out. We sometimes go to the Bible expecting to find a certain text there, but it reads differently; some

word which we wanted is missing. The Bible is not at fault, but we have hitherto read it inattentively. Thus, people have often invented a contrast in Rom. iii. 26 which is not in the text, by inserting the word *yet* into the expression, 'that He might be just, and (*yet*) the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' Again, in prayer, people insert the word *can* into the expression, 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we (*can*) ask or think' (Eph. iii. 20).

Amongst other comparatively little things, we should always watch the change of person, especially in the Psalms, as in the 32nd, where God is spoken to in the second person in the 7th verse, but He speaks in the first person in the 8th. So we should always notice the change of number, as in Luke xxii. 31, 32, where we read, 'Satan hath desired you, but I have prayed for thee.' Our Lord generally addressed His followers in the plural number, but many instances of the singular are found. Another instance may be taken from St. Paul's Epistles. In Gal. vi. 1, he lays down a general rule—'If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness;' then, applying it individually, he adds, 'considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.'

'Many passages,' says Boyle, 'which, at the first or second reading, I could find or guess no uses of, at the third or fourth I have discovered so pregnant in them, that I almost equally wondered at the richness of those texts, and at my not discerning it sooner. Of so precious a quality is the knowledge of Scripture, that no one part of it ought to be esteemed useless if it may



but facilitate or improve the understanding of any other.'

We bring new eyes to the Bible, as we do to nature, every time we come to it, for our circumstances are never quite the same, and our experience of life keeps increasing. If we are always on the watch for hidden treasures, we shall find them, and any amount of prayerful attention will be repaid; only we must be cautious not to put into Scripture what is not there.

It may be well to notice here that all the names in Scripture, whether of persons or places, have their meaning, and this should be looked for wherever it is possible. The interpretation was frequently given in patriarchal times, and occasionally in the Gospels, which remind us, for example, of the special significance of the Lord's dwelling at Nazareth, and of His sending the blind man to wash at Siloam.

**9. Attend to Figurative Language.** — Eastern languages seem to be much richer in figures than Western, owing, no doubt, to a different kind of mental development in the peoples. This might easily be shown by giving a few sentences from Arab, Persian, or Indian writers; but it is sufficient to refer to the Bible. In considering this subject, we have to remember that the Scriptures are much occupied in unfolding spiritual truth, and this must needs be presented through analogies found in natural life, and through figures borrowed from things visible. Almost all our own words for mental processes are taken from the action of the eye, hand, foot, or some other human organ.



First, that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual. The earth, with its laws, its phenomena, its daily occurrences, may have been specially intended to set forth Divine truths in concrete forms.

God uses figures largely in His dealings with men. The events in the lives of certain men—such as Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, and David—seem intended to portray some characteristic in the work of Christ. We regard such events as typical, and we might call them object-lessons or picture-teaching, whereby men's minds were opened and prepared for that which was to come.

Those mighty works which we call miracles were of a similar nature. They were not only credentials whereby the men who saw them might know that God had commissioned certain persons to utter His Word, but they were also illustrations, and as such, useful for all time. This is specially the case with the Lord's mighty works, which were almost all of a beneficent and curative character, and intended to teach us that He was able to remedy the analogous diseases of the soul.

Religious rites and ceremonies are also of the nature of figures, for they set forth to the eye certain methods of Divine action, or ways of human access whereby men might be encouraged to look onward, beyond the shadow to the substance, and beyond the ceremony to that which it prefigured.

Some of our Lord's deeds, which were in themselves ordinary, were intended to symbolise or set forth truth—as when He put the little child in the midst of the twelve and took him up in His arms; and when He

washed the disciples' feet ; and again when He breathed on the ten.

The figurative, or, as it is sometimes called, 'tropical,' language of Scripture may be divided into two kinds, the formal comparison or illustration, and the implied comparison or metaphor. Under the former class would come our Lord's parables and kindred teachings, also such a direct comparison as Psalm i. 4, 'the ungodly are like the chaff, which the wind driveth away.' When interpreting such passages, we have always carefully to study the point of comparison ; thus, the ungodly are only like the chaff in certain respects. They are driven away from the face of the earth, but they are not personally obliterated from existence. So also, we must remember that the same object, as 'the leaven' or 'the serpent,' may be used in different circumstances, to illustrate a good thing or a bad thing. Augustine reminds us that the lion stands for Christ in one passage, whilst it is taken as an illustration of Satan in another (*Christian Doctrine*, iii. 25).

A still larger number of figures come under the second head. The comparison is not formally made, but truth is stated in terms borrowed from earthly things. Many of these expressions are quite clear to us : 'The word of the Lord is clean ; I have borne you on eagles' wings ; the Lord God is a sun and shield ; Thou art my strong rock and house of defence ; Ephraim is a cake not turned ; break up your fallow ground ; I am the door of the sheep.' This class of illustration is quite clear. But in other cases it is not so easy to detect the meaning, either because of the obscurity of

the illustration, or because it is not quite certain whether the writer intended his words to be taken literally or figuratively. This difficulty is slightly increased by the fact that the usual word marking comparison (*as* or *like*) is frequently left out in Hebrew.

The Samaritan woman did not understand when our Lord spoke of living water; and the multitude misconceived His meaning when He spoke of bread from heaven; many stumbled when He told them that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood; and His disciples were mistaken as to His meaning when He cautioned them against leaven. Some still fail to see the force of the words, 'This is my body,' or 'that Rock was Christ;' whilst others whose authority stands high have interpreted the incense and pure offering mentioned in Mal. i. 11, as literal incense and a bloodless sacrifice, not noticing that the purity of the offerings of the Gentiles is in contrast with the polluted offerings of the Levites, and failing to remember that the Levitical incense and offerings are shadows of which Christ is the substance. There is a general rule that the literal interpretation is to be preferred; but this rule does not always hold good in dealing with prophetic language. Our object must be to find out what the prophet meant, and this will teach us to look for realities beneath figures.

Many obscurities in the writings of the prophets will be cleared up if we bear in mind that they frequently expressed future events in language borrowed from the past or present. Personages such as David and Elijah were to reappear, the Egyptian bondage was to be repeated,

the Red Sea crossed, the valley of Achor again to be a door of hope, but in what sense? Not in a literal but in a figurative sense; that is to say, persons and events answering to these would play their part in the future.

Before passing from this branch of our subject, a few words must be added on what is called anthropomorphism—*i.e.*, the attributing human feelings and actions to God. If I wish to speak to a deaf man, I must use gesture language; if a blind man wants to read, he must use raised type and read with his fingers. In the one case, the eye has to do the duty of the ear, and in the other, the sense of feeling has to make up for the loss of sight. And so, if God is to speak to man, He must adopt human language, and express truth in a way adapted to human ideas. Thus, in the Bible, God is described as seeing, hearing, smelling; having a voice, a mouth, nostrils, lips, breath, a hand, an arm, a back. He is said to rest, to walk, to laugh, to awake; to have a bow, a spear, a staff; to ride on horses and in chariots. Once more, He is said to repent, to be furious, to take vengeance.<sup>1</sup> The more one meditates on the matter, the more clear it is that this way of speaking of God in Scripture is wonderfully vivid and effective, and that if He were only spoken of in abstract philosophical terms, ordinary people would not understand them. Moreover, there is not the slightest danger of these terms being misunderstood, because alongside of them are other expressions calculated to make us feel how inadequate human

<sup>1</sup> See 'The Metaphorical Language applied to God in the Old Testament,' by R. B. Girdlestone. Hodder & Stoughton.



thought is to take in or express the grandeur of the Divine nature. They knew, for example, that He was Spirit, and not flesh; and the very chapter which tells us twice over that He repented, also says He is not a man that He should repent; so that we must deduct from our idea of repentance all the elements which spring from human imperfection (see 1 Sam. xv. 11, 29, 35).

**10. Analyse and Paraphrase.**—There are some argumentative passages, especially in St. Paul's Epistles, which are perplexing, owing to the way in which the writer tends to condense a number of aspects of truth into a few sentences. Each sentence is linked with its predecessor by a little word, and we travel on from sentence to sentence without clearly seeing the connection of the parts and the tendency of the whole. The first chapter of the Ephesians may be cited as a typical instance. The best method in such a case is to take a pen and sheet of paper, and proceed first to analyse, *i.e.*, take the passage to pieces, and then to paraphrase, *i.e.*, express each sentence in our own words. This is sometimes a long process, and we may be very dissatisfied with the results, but this need not discourage us. Our aim should be to turn the Apostle's chain into a series of positive sentences. Sometimes a passage where a series of contrasts or comparisons are drawn out may be dealt with in the same way—*e.g.*, the latter half of the 5th of the Romans. Again, in reading the discourses of our Lord and His Apostles, we sometimes feel a similar perplexity. Thus, when we are studying Acts ii., we



are brought at length to the close of St. Peter's speech, where he says, 'Wherefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ.' How does he reach this conclusion? We analyse the speech thus:—

- (1.) The outpouring of the Spirit fulfils Joel ii.
- (2.) Jesus, whose life and work is well known to the bystanders, has been crucified.
- (3.) This, though a terrible sin on their part, was overruled by God to carry out His scheme.
- (4.) For the Old Testament shows that the Messiah was not to see corruption, but was to rise.
- (5.) Jesus is risen, and we have seen Him.
- (6.) The Messiah was to sit at God's right hand.
- (7.) Jesus is there, and proves His presence there by the outpouring of the Spirit.
- (8.) Thus, our witness to the resurrection is confirmed by God's witness to the ascension.

## CHAPTER V.

### HINTS ON SPECIAL BOOKS.

1. **The Psalms.**—No part of the Old Testament is so often read, and may be used with so great profit, as the Book of Psalms. But they are by no means easy to be understood. Each Psalm has to be studied as a separate production, and to be read again and again, so that we can catch its spirit and its main divisions. The Jews divided the book into five portions, beginning with the 1st, the 42nd, the 73rd, the 90th, and the 107th respectively; but too much importance must not be attached to this division. A great many of the Psalms have titles, naming David or someone else as the writer. There are probably several contributors to this collection, and opinions vary as to the authorship of many Psalms; yet David's name is rightly given to the book as a whole, for he is emphatically the sweet singer of Israel. Some of these compositions may be illustrated from the life of David, and the occasions on which some were composed will be found in the historical books. Compare, for example, Ps. xviii. with 2 Sam. xxii., and Ps. cv. with 1 Chron. xvi. The Book of Psalms does not profess to be a complete collection of the songs of Israel, or even of David's hymns; thus, it does not

contain his lament over Saul (2 Sam. i.), or his 'last words' (2 Sam. xxiii.).

In form these compositions are all poetical; that is to say, they present parallelisms of thought either in the way of resemblance or of contrast. Some, however, are much more symmetrical in structure than others, and some are so arranged that the initials of the Hebrew verses follow the order of the alphabet. The 119th is the most notable instance of this, the first eight verses all beginning with the letter A (Aleph), the second eight with the letter B (Beth), and so on.

The occasions on which these sacred poems were composed varied exceedingly, and cannot often be discovered. Some call to mind victories, others defeat; some are national, others individual; some are joyful, others sad; some look back, others forward; some (*e.g.*, the 37th) are sententious, almost proverbial. Occasionally they begin with prayer, and end with praise; or they begin and end with praise, and describe the circumstances which give cause for thankfulness in the body of the Psalm.

In reading them, it is well to compare the Prayer Book version with the Bible. The latter is the latest and most accurate, but for stateliness of style and fullness of meaning the Prayer Book version is very helpful. Whenever we take up a Psalm for careful study, we should look for references to past events in Israel's history, in order to see what impressions these had made on the writer's mind. Then we should inquire whether the Psalm is quoted in the New Testament, and with what intent. The history of David is, in

many respects, a foreshadowing of Christ, for he was one in whom God was well pleased, he was anointed, persecuted, forsaken, spoken evil of falsely, yet a fearless fighter, a mighty conqueror, a great organiser. And the Spirit of God made use of these experiences and stages in his life whilst portraying the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.

Some of the Psalms are distressing to read in private, and still more in public worship. They seem to breathe a vindictive spirit very alien from the spirit of Him who said, 'Father, forgive them.' The 35th, 69th, and 109th may be taken as instances. In reading these, we have to remember that, although the Spirit used David as a mouthpiece, yet he was by no means a perfect man, and he may have given vent to feelings, even when under inspiration, which would not be commended for our example. But there is another way in which the matter may be regarded; and the use made of these Psalms in the New Testament will help us in appreciating it. There is to be a final triumph of good over evil, and that apparently not only in heaven but also on this earth. The enemies of Christ and His truth shall be destroyed at His coming, and God's righteous anger against rebellion and unbelief must take its course. All sins against God were regarded by David as personal offences. 'Do not I hate them that hate Thee? Yea, I hate them right sore, and regard them as mine enemies,' Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. There was a severe side to the character of Christ as well as a kind side. If it were not so, He would not be the true manifestation or embodiment of God's nature; and

this severe side finds expression in what are called the imprecatory Psalms, in which David calls down God's vengeance on the ungodly man, the persecutor, the hypocrite, the oppressor.

**2. The Prophets.**—Many people shrink from the study of the prophets, partly because they seem so difficult, and partly because opinions are supposed to differ so widely as to their interpretation. But probably we unconsciously exaggerate both the difficulties and the diversities. In the first place, let us remember that the prophets were preachers, and we may read large portions of their works as inspired sermons. Taken in this way, they give us wonderful insight into the condition of Israel and Judah in their times, and their discourses might be taken as models for many sermons, as in turn they plead, expostulate, beseech, and convict.

Beyond this, however, they were inspired to utter and record things about the time to come, which they could not have learnt by their own unaided powers. They speak of coming troubles and deliverances, of the fate of nations, and the destiny of empires, of the earth's future history, and of numberless details connected with the Redeemer's mission. There are about a hundred predictions of Christ in the Old Testament, the oldest about 4000 B.C., and the latest 400 B.C.

In studying these wonderful books, we have, in the first place, to distinguish between what is fulfilled and what is not. Dr. Keith's work on the fulfilment of prophecy deals usefully with this subject; but it is



above all things desirable that we should get a connected view of the history of the period covered by the prophets, of the rise and fall of the great Eastern empires, and of the stages of Jewish history.

It is probable that the Book of Jonah comes first among the prophets, and it is for many reasons the best to begin with, as it teaches us that God's threats are often conditional, and that His attributes guide and check the application and fulfilment of prophetic utterances. We may then follow the different groups of prophets in their chronological order, or take a sample from each epoch, till we find ourselves reading Malachi at the close of the prophetic era.

The special difficulty of the prophets lies in their highly poetical style, their slight passing allusions, their bold flights and figures. They leave much to the mind of the reader; and the English reader, certainly, is not always in a position to follow them, so that it is best sometimes to pass over the most abstruse passages, or to make them matters of special study with friends.

We should always consider who are the people to whom or of whom the prophet speaks, and whether his words appear to be limited in their application to a certain locality; also whether the subsequent movements of nations might bring some new people within the reach of the prophet's words; thus, for example, Egypt might stand for the nation which shall hereafter rule Egypt, instead of being confined to its early inhabitants. The Ethiopian eunuch put a wise question when he asked, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other man?'

Again, the references to past events in Israelite history are to be noted. Sometimes they are very incidental, but not the less interesting, as when Zechariah refers to the way in which the people fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, Zech. xiv. 5; see also Amos i. 1; or when Amos refers to the fact that the Syrians 'threshed' Gilead, Amos i. 3, using the same word as in 2 Kings xiii. 7, where the historical event is recorded. It is evident that these and similar events lay deep down in the people's heart, and such references to them were well calculated to awaken reflection in thoughtful minds. One of the most interesting of these references is that in Jer. xxvi. 18, where persecution against the prophet is thwarted by the recollection of something which had happened many years before, a verse being quoted from the prophecy of Micah, and the effect it produced on Hezekiah being mentioned (see Micah iii. 12).

**3. Unfulfilled Prophecy.**—When we pass from fulfilled to unfulfilled prophecy, we need special patience and wisdom, and we ought to be very diffident as to the certainty of our interpretations. But we must not shrink from the task when a suitable opportunity presents itself, for there is a special blessing attached to the study. It would not be desirable in this sketch to discuss the various schemes put forth by students, or to compare the merits of Fleming and Frere, Fairbairn and Faber, Ben Ezra and Birks, Elliott, Garratt, and Guinness. A few practical suggestions only must be offered.

(1.) We may feel tolerably certain that unfulfilled prophecy will receive its accomplishment in somewhat the same manner as that which has been already fulfilled. Hence the advantage of studying the last-named first.

(2.) Much help may be got by examining the use made by the New Testament writers of the Old Testament prophecies; especially when we get to the Book of the Revelation, where we find so many passages or ideas from Ezekiel and others used as clothing for the visions presented to John's mind.

(3.) The same prophecy may contain a limited and expanded, a national and spiritual, a past and a future interpretation. That which applies first to Israel may apply afterwards to Christ, and yet may have a future application to an enlarged Israel with a Jewish nucleus and Gentile offshoots.

(4.) Great light is thrown on prophecy by the fact that interpretations were sometimes given by Divine command, as in the Book of Daniel. These not only solve the passage immediately under consideration, but also put a key into our hand whereby we can unlock other mysteries.

(5.) The second coming of Christ is to the Christian very much what the first coming was to the Jew, and must be interpreted in relation to it.

(6.) As there were considerable gaps or gulfs between various periods referred to by the prophets as following one another, so it may be with regard to the ages to come. The future may prove to be infinitely longer than the past.

(7.) As in the Old Testament some passages are

consecutive, some contemporary, and some retrogressive, so it may be in the case of the Apocalyptic visions. The expressions, 'in that day' and 'the day of the Lord,' may cover a vast period of time and many events.

(8.) In dealing with dates and numbers, we must remember that the Jews frequently used round numbers—*e.g.*, *four* answers to the points of the compass, *ten* to the fingers, *seven* and *eight* to the week and the day over (*vide* Eccles. xi. 2; Micah v. 5); also days are put for years, weeks for periods of seven, months for periods of thirty, and years for periods of three hundred and sixty.

**4. The Gospels and Acts.**—The Gospels are unique. There is no literature in the world like them. They are not stories, not biographies, not memoirs in the ordinary sense. No one of them professes to be 'a life of Christ.' They all tell the same glad tidings, but each in a different way. Aided by the Holy Spirit, who brought all things to their remembrance, the writers reproduce scenes from the life and ministry of the Saviour, and give us the very words of Him who spake as never man spake. The Gospels are all, strictly speaking, anonymous, though the names of the writers were known from very earliest times; and they suppress their deepest feelings and forget themselves in their work, which is to present a vivid portraiture of Christ. He lives and moves in their pages, and is the central figure throughout.

'Far better,' says Dr. Sewell in his 'Last Words,' 'to

have those gracious and awful lineaments drawn for us as they are by the pen of the Holy Spirit, than to allow the pencil of human imagination to attempt even with the most reverent hand what might risk profanation. The press is loaded with biographies of men to whose memory we cling with admiration, professing to be pictures of the inner and outer man. But compare them with the characteristics of the four Gospels, and any thoughtful mind will be struck with the profoundest surprise, that all those four depart so far from any mere human models. No human individual, no body of men, bound as they were to their great Master by every feeling of adoration and love—knowing that upon the portrait they were drawing depended the salvation of souls and the coming of the kingdom of God—would from mere human calculations and mere human reasoning have exhibited that portrait in the form in which it is now presented to our eye.’

Our object in studying them is to learn what we can of Jesus Christ, how He lived, taught, and died. This may be learnt in outline from any one Gospel, and there is no better commencement of our study than to devote a few hours to the reading of a Gospel straight through with an open prayerful heart and attentive mind. We shall get a more effective conception of Christ as a whole this way than in any other.

When we set ourselves to the detailed study of a Gospel, chapter by chapter, we have to consider—First, the outline of the Lord’s life, so as to get a clear idea of its proportion. Second, the subjects of His teaching. Third, His method of setting forth truths new and old,



and of answering the captious questions of the Pharisees. Fourth, His dealings with different classes of people who were brought into relation with Him—*e.g.*, the disciples, the multitude, the educated, and the rulers of different kinds. Then we are led on to contemplate His mighty works; the actual amount of labour involved in His circuits—*e.g.*, among the 240 cities and villages of Galilee; His deeds of mercy to the sick, the blind, the lame, the leper, the possessed—no two miracles being wrought under exactly the same circumstances; also His mastery over the elements and over the animal world. As we read on, we get new and deeper views of His mission, His Divine nature, and His claims; nor do we forget to notice His authoritative method of teaching, especially with regard to the future. And so we pass on till we come to the pages telling of His crucifixion. Here all the Evangelists tell their story slowly and in full detail, as if nothing were more important than that we should get a vivid picture of those last solemn hours. Finally, all the four speak briefly and in a tone of calm assurance of His resurrection.

The student of one Gospel finds himself driven at every turn to look at the other three. Each has a special aim; St. Luke tells us his object at the beginning, and St. John makes his known at the end of the last chapter but one. Whilst the fourth Gospel is very much confined to conversations based on a few incidents which took place chiefly in the South, the others give an account of our Lord's work and teaching in Galilee, and in so doing they follow in the main

what has been called a common tradition—*i.e.*, an outline in ordinary use among the early Christians. But even in these three, each Gospel supplements another. Thus, when our Lord was teaching, and His mother and His brethren stood without desiring to speak with Him, St. Matthew simply records the fact, adding our Lord's remarkable words which follow (Matt. xii. 50); but St. Mark supplies an important particular, which gives us the key to the whole incident (iii. 21), telling us that the Lord's relations had really come to take Him, possibly by force, believing Him to be mad, and had brought with them His mother to enforce their request.

There are some difficulties which the student will meet with if he ever attempts to harmonise the accounts of our Lord's life in the four Gospels. These have been discussed from very early times, and attempts have been made, from the second century downwards, to frame a complete life of Christ from the materials provided by the Evangelists. These harmonies are interesting, and may be useful, but their value must not be over-estimated. Works like that of Dr. Edersheim on 'The Life and Times of the Messiah,' or the smaller, simpler work of Mr. Stalker on the same subject, are very helpful in bringing vividly before the mind the age in which our Lord lived on earth.

When we pass from the Gospels to the Acts, we seem to be breathing a different atmosphere. The Lord Jesus, who was the central figure of the Gospels, has gone away, and the dispensation of the Holy

Ghost has set in. The Apostles, whose ignorance and timidity had been unsparingly alluded to in the Gospels, now come to the front. They are enlightened, courageous, self-denying, and speak with authority. We read their speeches to find out what were the facts and truths on which they laid most stress in preaching, first to the Jews and subsequently to the Gentiles; and we study their history in order to learn all we can of the growth and organisation of the early Church, its triumph over difficulties and prejudices. The book is rightly called by some the Acts of the Holy Ghost.

5. **The Epistles.**—The Epistles or letters of our Lord's first inspired followers are considered by some to be too difficult for ordinary people. This is a great mistake. They have their special difficulties, which cannot always be solved, even by the most expert commentators, but these letters were intended for ordinary people, and the more patiently they are studied as the original letters of the leaders of Christendom, the more fruitful they will be found. We should know little of the inner history and perplexities of the early churches without them. We should not get at the mind of such an one as St. Paul without them. It is in their letters that we find the full development and application of Christian truth, especially the doctrine of the atonement in its practical bearing on life. It is also the universal testimony of missionaries that they would have lost the very best handbook for training infant churches, and for guiding young converts, if they had been deprived of the Epistles.

Each letter should be read as a whole, in the light of the history both of the writer and of the church to whom he writes, so far as these can be gathered from the Acts or from other sources ; its main divisions should be marked, and its method of arguing out and setting forth truth studied. It is interesting to observe how we find the same truth set forth in many forms, not dogmatically affirmed, but illustrated and commended to man's reason and conscience, and adapted to the exigencies of the churches.

It is best to study St. Paul's Epistles chronologically and in groups, beginning with the Thessalonians, the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Romans. St. James's Epistle should be read when we are fresh from St. Matthew, St. John's after the fourth Gospel, of which it seems to be a practical application, and St. Peter's after St. Mark's Gospel, being read also in connection with his speeches in the Acts.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE STUDY OF DOCTRINE.

1. **What is meant by Doctrine.**—It is one thing to investigate the meaning of Scripture as we read it verse by verse and passage by passage, and it is another thing to study what are usually called the doctrines contained therein. As there are laws—*i.e.*, regular order and systematic recurrences—underlying the various phenomena of nature, so there are certain foundation truths and central principles beneath the surface of Scripture, with its manifold phases of life and teaching. It has been said that, if we want to master Nature, we must yield to its laws; and this is true of Scripture. But we must learn them before we can yield to them, and this involves much patience and deep humility. We are starting on a difficult path, calling for the sanctified use of all our powers; but it is not an untrodden path; there have been students of doctrine from the beginning, and the Christian Church formulated the foundation principles of sacred truth at its earliest dawn.

The word ‘doctrine’ means teaching; it does not signify something obscure, far-fetched, or mysterious, it includes properly all that God has taught concerning



Himself, and concerning man's duty, safety, and prospects. All doctrine, in the ordinary sense of the word, has a practical bearing on life, and all true life springs from belief in true doctrine.

**2. Bias, Mental and Ecclesiastical.**—The celebrated John Locke, in his work on the Conduct of the the Human Understanding, says that if we wish to find the truth, we must start without a bias. This sounds well, but the advice cannot altogether be carried out; as some one has said, we might as well be ordered to start without a head. Bias is of several kinds. There is moral bias, and there is intellectual bias. In spite of its high moral instincts, human nature is biassed in a wrong direction owing to the fall of man. We must recognise this fact, and, whilst feeling that we are unable to get rid of our old tendencies, we cannot do better than resolutely follow St. Peter's advice (1 Peter ii. 1, 2) 'laying aside all malice, all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speaking, as new-born babes desire the unadulterated milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'

Most of us are also subject to bias from the fact that we have been born, baptised, and instructed in the doctrines of some particular church. We have had a particular kind of surrounding from childhood upwards, whereby we have imbibed certain notions which have become a sort of second nature. Christian parents, if worthy of the name, bring up their children in the faith into which they have been baptised. Children are not allowed to grow up unbiassed from infancy;

the seeds of evil are not permitted to spring up and thrive rank and unchecked, nor are the germs of selfishness and self-will allowed to blossom and develop into immorality.

This is true also of doctrine. Protestants do not throw the Bible at the feet of their children and say, Take it or not, as you choose ; make the best you can of it, pick out what you like, and reject the rest. Though churches do not publish authorised commentaries, yet they generally accept the ancient creeds, and have formularies, confessions, or other public standards by which they can be judged, and these are made the basis of Christian education. The Rule of Faith, as held among Bible-loving Christians, is the same in essentials, as may be seen by consulting any work on the harmony of Protestant confessions.

Nor is this to be wondered at, as St. Augustine has said (*Christian Doctrine*, iii. 2), The Rule of Faith is the general doctrinal teaching of the plain parts of Scripture, confirmed by the authority of the Church. It is, in other words, the common belief of Christendom, the heritage which has come down to us alongside of the Scriptures from the days of the Apostles. No doubt such expressions as 'the authority of the Church' have been terribly misused. Men have forgotten that, as the word church has several meanings, so authority has various degrees. Those condensed statements of truth which we call Creeds (at any rate, the Apostles' and the Nicene), may be regarded as keys to Scripture, and as safeguards against error ; and a respect for the Rule or Analogy of Faith, based as it is on the principle that

all truth must be harmonious, and must be exhibited in its true proportions, is one of the primary requirements of the student of doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the young and those who have no opportunity for independent study are taught by their elders and by those in authority in the church to which they belong, a time comes for many of us to put away childish things, and to search the Scriptures, and see if the doctrines we have been taught are in accordance with the plain teaching of Scripture. Our business then is to test doctrine by God's Word, and to fill up from the same authoritative source the outline which we have received from ancient times. This is the true position of Protestantism, and it is nowhere set forth more plainly than in the Sixth Article of the Church of England, where we read that 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.'

The late Dr. Sewell, in his 'Last Words,' makes a touching and striking confession of the change of view he experienced, and of the way in which he reached his final convictions on this subject. After referring to the fact that he once had no very clear idea why the Bible should be regarded as inspired, and that his view of Church authority had made him disregard the absolute necessity of the Bible for fixing the standards

<sup>1</sup> This subject is fully worked out in Jeremy Taylor's celebrated 'Liberty of Prophesying.'

of belief, he continues, 'I had no doubt whatever of its inspiration, but I fear I did not cling to it, revere it, adore it, as the voice of the Holy Spirit, as I now do, when twelve years of uninterrupted leisure have enabled me to examine a portion of it with a most minute and impartial and fearless criticism as a Greek scholar. I cannot describe *the awe, the wonder, the loving thankfulness, the entire unshaken trust*' (the italics are his) 'which that examination has impressed on my mind. There was a time when the word "Bibliolatry" sounded to my ears as it has sounded to others; as if in worshipping the Bible we ran too great risk of idolatry. I now confess for myself that I do worship the Bible as the voice of the Holy Spirit, I do bow down and adore it as the perfect oracle of God.'

### 3. How the Study of Doctrine is to be approached.

—In our pursuit of truth, one or two preliminary cautions must be observed. First, we must not expect to find any systematic treatise on doctrine in the Scriptures, or any set of rules or precepts adapted for all the exigencies of daily life. God's revelation has not proceeded on this method. He has rather left us to draw out truth by diligent searching and comparison. Secondly, we must not expect to find rules and regulations for church government, and for the carrying out of Christian worship. We have certain authoritative precedents, such as those in the Acts, and guiding principles, such as those in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, but particular churches have always felt at liberty to arrange their own internal organisation and

discipline, and to ordain ceremonies and rites, provided only that they are in harmony with God's Word. There is room here for considerable diversity; and perhaps we have too great a tendency to read our particular views in such matters *into* the Bible, if we cannot legitimately draw them out. But in truth, Scripture is larger than any church, and the organisation of the Church of God ought to be—like the love and the commandments of God—exceeding broad (Ps. cxix. 96).

Always bearing in mind the cautions just alluded to, and recognising the authority due to the voice of Christendom, to Catholic consent, to ancient formularies, and to the experience of our natural or authorised teachers, it is wise to cultivate the habit of going to the fountain-head, to the Scripture itself, in order to learn what we ought to believe, how we ought to live, and what we have to expect hereafter. In saying this, we are but echoing the wish of Archbishop Magee, 'that the doctrines of Scripture were at all times collected purely from Scripture itself' (Atonement, i. 7).

**4. Central Truths to be studied first.**—The first thing to do is to get a general idea of the main doctrines of Scripture, the great central truths concerning God and man. These are written in large characters, not in words only, but in deeds, and are presented in such varied aspects, and in such vivid colours, that men of every age, country, and intellectual condition, can take them in. The spiritual nature of God, His eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, His long-suffering, faithfulness, and righteousness, these are the A B C of Truth,



and underlie everything. The fallen condition of man, his moral inability to serve his Creator, and fulfil the law of righteousness, his misery, and his sad prospects if left to himself, these indeed need no Bible to proclaim them; the Bible in this matter simply affirms and puts in its true light what we know all too well from our own experience. But the plan and purpose of redemption, the manifold preparation for the coming of Christ, His Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, the work of the Atonement, whereby the sinner may be received back to his Father, and the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby the believer enters into newness of life, these are taught plainly, not in one passage, but in many, all through the New Testament. Again, the promises of God to the faithful, the development of the kingdom of Christ, the coming period of judgment, and the prospects of the righteous and the wicked, are seen clearly in outline, though the filling in of these august mysteries cannot be discerned as yet. Once more, the nature of belief, repentance, conversion, the way to appropriate the blessings of salvation, the duties incumbent on Christians in consequence of their profession, the doing the will of God, the crucifixion of self, the renunciation of sin, the life of love and purity and conformity to Christ's example, may be traced without difficulty through the New Testament. Special passages may cause perplexity, but the general teaching is clear, and this is what we ought to follow. This is well put in the 17th Article of the Church of England, where we read that 'we must receive God's promises as they be generally set forth in Holy Scripture, and in our doings

that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.' Similarly, Augustine says (*Christian Doctrine*, ii. 9) that, among the things plainly laid down in Scripture, are to be found all matters that concern faith and the manner of life.

It is only when we get beyond these elementary and all important matters, that difficulties generally arise, and these spring not from our going to the Scripture for truth, nor from our reading the Bible too much, but from disregarding the right methods of study. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that men are differently constituted; some lean more upon the external, ceremonial, and traditional side of religion, and others more upon its personal and spiritual aspects. Also, memories are not equally retentive, and Augustine rightly says, that if the memory be defective, no rules can supply the want.

### 5. Seven Methods of Searching for Truth.—

(1.) One of the best methods of studying a doctrine is to deal with it historically, as St. Paul dealt with faith in the 11th of Hebrews. Thus we may trace the history of redemption from Genesis to the Revelation; the foundation-stone is laid in Gen. iii. 16, the outline of the structure in Gen. xii.; there is a prefiguring of redemption in the Exodus; and types of redemption in Leviticus; the brazen serpent is set up in Numbers; a series of redemptive works are set forth in the pages of the Historical Books. Redemption from sin comes to light in the Psalms and Prophets; and so we reach the days and work of the Redeemer, in the New Testament.

Other subjects, such as prayer, faith, pardon, the kingdom of God, retribution, may be dealt with in this historical method.

(2.) Another plan is to compare the different aspects of one particular quality, as St. Paul dealt with love or charity in 1 Cor. xiii. Humility, meekness, hope, assurance, and sin may be treated thus.

(3.) Or we may contrast the dispensations, as St. Paul does so frequently, in order to see the gains or losses of Jew and Gentile and Christian in such matters as access to God, cleansing, insight into the Divine nature, and views of the world to come.

(4.) Again, we may question each book as we read it, and say, What doctrines may fairly be gathered from this book? What does the writer contribute to the sum total of revelation? or what development of truths previously revealed do we find in his pages? What thoughts of God, of duty, and of human destiny would any well-instructed Jew learn from its pages? And how far did our Lord sanction, expand, correct, or supplement them?

(5.) Or we may trace the revelation of the nature of God in human history, as set forth in Scripture, as the Strength of those who trust Him, the Rewarder of those who seek Him, the Punisher of those who rebel against Him. We may then test our conclusions by the direct statements concerning His nature and attributes which we find here and there in Scripture; and finally we may bring the results to bear on our study of Christ, in Whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And further, recognising the fact that the period in

which our Lord ministered on earth was a transition period, and yet that He wrought and taught for the benefit of all time, we may take the Epistles as commentaries on the Gospels, and illustrate the Lord's words and deeds, especially His crucifixion and resurrection, by the use made of them by the Apostles in after time.

(6.) Some subjects must be studied first in the Gospels, secondly, in the latter books of the New Testament, and thirdly, in the Old Testament. Thus, if we were going to inquire into the person, nature, and character of Christ, we set ourselves to inquire, What do the Evangelists say on the subject? What did the Lord Himself say or imply? What did others say of Him? What inferences may be drawn from His work as a whole? What impressions were produced on the minds of His Apostles? In what way were the minds of the Jews prepared for the manifestation of such a being? The great question of salvation for sinners may best be treated in a similar way.

(7.) Another interesting way of studying doctrines is to regard them as laws of the spiritual world. Thus, there is the principle of hardening the heart, the Spirit's mode of energising, the law of growth in grace, the relation of God's power to man's faith, the relation of promise or covenant to performance, the responsible agency of man's will in connection with the overruling of God, the ordinary and extraordinary providence of God, the method of revelation, the causes of unbelief, the origin, history, and end of evil, the relation of signs to things signified.

The topics that come up for study are practically endless, and the methods of handling them will vary considerably, but those now enumerated may be taken as fairly representative.

**6. Hints and Cautions.**—A few practical cautions may be offered before leaving this branch of our subject.

Do not make Scripture ‘a nose of wax,’ capable of being bent in any direction, as if every passage would teach every doctrine and apply to every circumstance of life. Draw from each passage the truth which it legitimately teaches, making the plain parts the key to the obscure, the expanded to the condensed, the literal to the figurative. Each passage has its own meaning, though capable of being used for many purposes. Augustine (Christian Doctrine, iii. 27) is inclined to hold that a passage may have several interpretations, provided they are in harmony with the truth of Scripture generally; but we ought always to try and find out, as he practically acknowledges, *the meaning which the writer intended*.

Do not multiply types. They certainly exist in Scripture, but not in such quantities as we sometimes suppose. Bishop Ellicott once said, ‘Do not assert the existence of typical relation between persons, places, and things unless they are recognised in Scripture either directly or by reasonable inference.’ Another rule may be appended to this, do not prove a doctrine from a type, use it rather to illustrate and confirm a doctrine. There is a tendency in many



expositors to say of certain historical events in the Old Testament, This is a Type; but many things may be used as illustrations which may not fairly be pressed as types.

Do not spiritualise away the plain assertions of God's Word; grasp the facts before you; analyse the feelings, the motives, the conduct of the speaker, the actor, the writer; picture up the details of the narrative; see what light is thrown on human nature or on things Divine; consider what are the analogous circumstances of your own time and case, and draw out the doctrine accordingly. This seems to be the method in which the Lord and His Apostles generally read the Old Testament.

In expounding parables, remember that they are only analogies thrown into the form of narratives, and consequently the details must not be pressed too far. It has been said that 'none of them run on four legs.' Seize their central points, guided by the context so far as possible, and let the accessories be treated as accessories. 'These,' says Boyle, 'are like the feathers that wing our arrows, which, though they pierce not like the head, are yet requisite to make the shaft to pierce.'

Distinguish between different truths and different ways of presenting the same truth. We must not make that complicated which God has made simple. The return of the sinner to God, and the renewed life in Christ are really simple things; but, being set forth in different aspects, they are regarded by some people as if they consisted of a number of distinct processes.

Suppose, for example, that one preacher calls us to seek the Lord; another may say, you must pray; a third, you cannot pray till you are converted; a fourth, you cannot be converted till you repent; a fifth, you cannot repent till you have a new heart; a sixth, you can only get a new heart by coming to Christ for it. Each one of these remedies for the sin-stained soul is good in itself, but after all the way of salvation is *one*; all roads are good which lead a man to Christ, and no road is good which fails of this.

Lastly, let us always aim at being positive rather than negative. As Augustine says: 'The man who knows that there is a resurrection of the dead is assuredly better than the man who only knows that if there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ is not risen.'

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PRACTICAL AND DEVOTIONAL USE OF THE BIBLE.

1. **Meditation on the Word.**—We have now come to the last and most important stage of our subject. The student has sought God's blessing on the Word, and has endeavoured to find out its meaning and teaching; and it remains for him to ask, How does this passage apply to me? to my own life and destiny and relation to God? What guidance does it offer me in my social intercourse? in my business life? in my dealings with the world? in my teaching, visiting, or mission work?

We need to be honest with ourselves at this point. We are inclined to qualify and modify the precepts of Christ and His claim on the Christian disciple. We tone down unconsciously the vigour of St. Paul's remonstrances, the force of his figures, such as 'Death to sin,' the strictness of the law of retribution, and of judgment according to works; the demand of absolute self-sacrifice, and of truth at any cost; the need of meekness, forbearance, self-restraint, and sympathy. Again, we feel God's promises to be too high for us, we know He is perfect, and we are vile. What can He have to do with such as we are? He is faithful, but will He be so

to us? He is a prayer-hearing God, but will He hear our prayers?

Nevertheless our duty is clear. Every promise must be grasped and realised as true; every precept must be registered in the heart, and acted out in the life, in the strength of God. In this spirit of readiness we seek to turn God's truth into action.

Our first duty is to meditate. Some people say they cannot meditate; they do not know what it means, or they have no time, or they go to sleep when they begin. But meditation is a matter of habit, and we can all be trained into it. What are its elements? It consists primarily in picturing up the actual state of things brought before us in our reading, whether it be an incident, a prayer, an exhortation, a proverb, a prophecy.

Then we have mentally to adjust the picture thus formed with the pictures already in our mind—to hang it, so to speak, in its right place, so that it may blend with the convictions of truth already attained.

Thirdly, we seek to link the spirit of the passage with our own personal experience of things human and Divine.

Fourthly, we seek to stir up our soul to notes of praise and thanksgiving, delighting ourselves in God's Word, rejoicing in the prospect it presents, yielding ourselves in joyful submission to its precepts, and at the same time searching ourselves in the light of its cautions, humbling ourselves over our past coldness or doubts—for most of our failures come from doubting God. This seems to be the process called inwardly digesting God's truth.

**2. Turn Scripture into Prayer.**—When in a spirit of quiet thought we have thus resolved and revolved God's Word, we are prepared to pray over it. The Bible is the best prayer-book in the world,<sup>1</sup> as it has been called the best story-book in the world. It is full of instances of prayer; it supplies us with those thoughts about God which stimulate our faith to approach Him expectantly, earnestly, confidently. The records of human need and Divine generosity are not far-fetched; they answer to our own case. The intercession of Abraham for Sodom, the prayer of Abraham's servant, the wrestling of Jacob, the pleadings of Moses, the strong crying of David, the spiritual conflicts of Elijah, Jonah, and Jeremiah, the public and formal prayers of Solomon and Ezra, and the secret confessions of Daniel—all are the outpourings of hearts like our own. They do not seem very ancient. In most respects they might have been written in our own life-time. The New Testament gives us further teaching about the way of approach, and makes new demands on our spiritual life, whilst offering us a new standard to live up to. Thus, we are called and encouraged to new labour in prayer, whilst we have a new example in Him Who prayed, and wept, and bled.

<sup>1</sup> 'I cannot but think,' says Robert Boyle, 'that by neglecting the Scripture for ethical compositions, or even books of devotion, men as well wrong themselves as the Scripture. Scarce anything has given me a more favourable character of Luther than his wish that all his books of devotion were burnt, when he once perceived that the people's fondness and over-valuation of them produced a neglect of the study of the Bible.'



Every precept in Scripture may be turned into prayer, and every promise into praise. We may find something in every passage which comes before us both to pray over and to thank God over. Coleridge once said that, if we wish to make old truths fresh, we must turn them into action. All action presupposes prayer, and all prayer ought to lead on to action. God's promises are not a substitute for prayer, but a stimulus to it. He knoweth what we have need of before we ask, but He expects us to ask all the same. He will be inquired of by us. And so prayer is not a substitute for action, but the deliberate contact of the soul with God, whence we draw an enabling force whereby we go forth conquering and to conquer.

**3. Apply Scripture to Daily Life.**—In applying Scripture to our own case, and making it a light to our feet and a lamp to our path, we need to bear in mind certain principles of application such as the following:—

(1.) God is the same now as in the days of the Apostles, of David, of Abraham, of Adam. Jesus Christ is also the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The Spirit of the living God is the same as when Paul said, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.' The hearts of all men are fashioned alike, influenced by the same classes of motives, and liable to the same temptations and difficulties. Modern questions are really old. Even such matters as land laws, adulteration, class legislation, social purity, have been dealt with as far back as the days of Moses.

Hence the Book of God is to be used by us freely in dealing with all matters of to-day's interest, and is to be consulted at every turn in our life. It is written for all time and for all classes, and has some message for every one of us every day of our lives: 'These books,' says Robert Boyle, 'were so wisely and graciously tempered that, as some pictures seem to have their eyes directly fixed on every one that looks on them, from what part soever of the room he eyes them, there is scarce any frame of spirit a man may be of, or any condition he can be in, to which some passage of Scripture is not as patly applicable as if it were meant for him, or said to him, as Nathan once did to David, "Thou art the man."'

(2.) Many things were written for our instruction which were not written for our example. Numbers of things have been said and done and have been recorded in the Bible which we must not say or do. Some would be downright immoral, whilst others are not adapted for our times and circumstances. We have to remember that even an inspired man is not infallible; a prophet or an apostle may be blameworthy in conduct; Peter was to be condemned, Paul and Barnabas quarrelled, the spirit of Elijah is alien to the Spirit of Christ.

(3.) We must bear in mind the remark of Robert Boyle, that all parts of Scripture are useful in some ages, and some in all, and that many commands are temporary and applicable to special cases, and so not of universal obligation. Augustine says (*Christian Doctrine*, iii. 17), Some commands are given to all in common, others to

particular persons. Sanction was sometimes given to customs in Israel which were only barely permissible in early times, but would now be ranked as wrong. Whilst it is true that certain human characteristics which lay dormant in the days of the Old Testament were developed in the Christian dispensation, it is also the case that modes of speaking and living which were winked at in the Mosaic age, tacitly drop out of existence under the rule and influence of the Spirit of Christ. There were many beliefs and customs among the Jews in our Lord's time which, so far as we know, He did not expose or interdict, but we dare not say that what He did not condemn in so many words, He sanctioned. Rather, He exhibited certain principles in His life and teaching which tended to undermine and get rid of all that was false, as light gets rid of darkness; moreover, His Apostles were guided to apply these principles to the circumstances of their day, and to establish a series of precedents according to which life in its many sides might be rightly directed.

(4.) We have to distinguish between a deed or statement being recorded and being approved or ordered. As Boyle has said, 'All is not Scripture that is in the Scripture; many wicked persons are introduced whose sayings the Holy Ghost does not adopt, but barely registers, nor does the Scripture affirm that which they said was true, but that it is true they said it.' Job's friends were not always right in their views or in their condemnation of this afflicted man, though they undoubtedly gave utterance to many wise sayings. A

doctrine cannot be proved true because it was uttered by David or Hezekiah or a wise woman of Tekoah, though, in any such case, it must be treated with full respect, and used as a confirmation of direct doctrinal teaching. If a Pharisee asks, Who can forgive sins but God only? we keep our mind in suspense; but if on high authority we read, 'To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses' (Dan. ix. 9), our mind is clearer on the subject; and when we find God revealing Himself as ready to forgive (Exod. xxxiv. 7), all doubt as to the source of pardon is over.

**4. Primary and Secondary Principles.**—It is important to gather the main principles of life and duty from the New Testament as a whole, before perplexing ourselves with any doubtful details. What doth the Lord seek of us? Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? How ought I to regulate my heart, my aims, my life? I may be puzzled about some practical matters, and uncertain as to apparently conflicting duties, but there need be no uncertainty about the springs of action. What is a Christian? What does he really believe? Whom must he follow? To Whom does he devote heart, life, and all? What is he hoping for? Those questions lie at the root of the tree of human life. To believe in the mission of the Son of God; to appropriate His atoning work while submitting wholly to His will; to live in conformity with His mind and example through a constant yielding to the energising of the Holy Ghost; to walk in love because He loved us; to keep unspotted from the world; to be living in



expectancy of the day when He shall come again to reward every one according to his works; these are the first principles of Christian life, agreed on, theoretically at least, by all believers of every name. Other things must be accepted or rejected according as they fall in with these root principles or not. There is undoubtedly a right and a wrong in every detail of life, and everything may be taken to God in prayer for guidance and power; nor can there be full joy and peace in believing unless in all things we walk according to His will, and it is only by the constant searching of Scripture with prayer that we understand what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.

Augustine (*Christian Doctrine*, i. 35) says that, 'As the end of Scripture is that we should love God and our neighbour, any interpretation of Scripture which does not tend to promote these feelings cannot be true; whilst, if a man gives a mistaken interpretation which yet tends to build up love, he goes astray in much the same way as a man who, by mistake, quits the high road, but reaches through the fields the same place to which the road leads.'

### **5. Conditional and Unconditional Statements.—**

We have to bear in mind that some rules and statements given in Scripture are not absolute or unconditional. Thus, in 2 Tim. iii. 12, we read that 'the godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,' but we must not, on account of such a text as this, either court persecution or torment ourselves because it does not come. St.



Paul had a particular period in his mind. It is one of the most interesting features of the Epistles that they are manifestly written in times of persecution. Such times may come again, and we must be ready for them, but there are also times when churches, and consequently individuals, have rest.

In 1 John ii. 26 we read, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things.' This is not a dogmatic declaration that the Christian is omniscient, or that he can do without the help of teaching; if it had been so, St. John manifestly need not have troubled himself to write this Epistle.

In Rom. vi. 14 we are told that 'sin shall not have dominion over us.' This is not an unconditional promise; we find it in the form of an exhortation two verses earlier, where we read, 'let not sin reign in your mortal members.'

Similarly, when we read in Deut. xv. 11 that 'the poor shall never cease out of the land,' we must not treat the words as an absolute rule or order which everyone must calmly acquiesce in.

It is to be borne in mind that some sentences which are put into the form of precepts are ironical. Thus, in 1 Cor. xv. 32, we read, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' Compare Isa. xxii. 13, from which the words are taken. There are many ironical passages in the Old Testament. Thus, in Ezek. xx. 39, we read, 'Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto Me;' and again in Amos iv. 4, 'Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression.'

Some passages which read in the English Bible as statements ought to be questions. The distinction between the two is generally plain in Hebrew, but not so in Greek. We might, for example, read Matt. xxvi. 45 thus, 'Do you still sleep on and take your rest?' and 1 Cor. vi. 4, 'Do ye set them to judge who are least esteemed?' and 2 Cor. xii. 16, 'Did I catch you with guile?'

To these practical hints it should be added that, if doubtful about the bearing of a passage in our own life and course of duty, it is well to wait. If we cultivate a willingness of spirit and a readiness to be guided by God, He will make our way plain. Perplexities not infrequently come from a secret unwillingness to give up everything to God, and to lay our lives unreservedly at His footstool, and they will do us good if they should only cause us to look within and try the ground of our hearts.

A reference may here be made to the seven rules of Tichonius, which Augustine discusses in his 'Christian Doctrine' (iii. 30-37). The most important are these: (1.) We must distinguish between the Head and the Body, though sometimes spoken of as one. (2.) We must distinguish between the true and the mixed Church, or, as we usually say, the invisible and the visible Church. This is a vital distinction. We must not imagine that both sets of people really constitute one body, though they are for a time united by a common participation of the sacraments. (3.) We must distinguish between the letter and the spirit; (4.) between the species and the genus, or, as Augustine interprets

it, the part and the whole. (5.) We must be careful in the interpretation of times and numbers. (6.) We must study periods, to see whether they are consecutive or not. (7.) We must distinguish between the fate of the devil and the destiny of those whom he deceives.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### METHOD AND ORDER OF READING THE BIBLE.

1. **Various Schemes Commented on.**—All Christians are exhorted to read their Bibles, but they are not always given specific directions for doing so. Men often ask, How often am I to read? and how much? and at what time? and where shall I begin? These questions cannot be answered off-hand, or by a stranger to each person's circumstances; and only a few hints can be offered in such a book as this.

It is good to devote certain fixed times to the Word of God; and the earlier in the day the better.

All people cannot give the same amount of time and thought to God's Word before going to their work; but every one could find time to read a short selected passage or text in the morning, and a longer one in the evening, or *vice versa*. In order to facilitate this practice, there are several text almanacks issued yearly by various societies or parochial agencies, and numerous text-books, such as, 'The Soul's Enquiries' (Hatchard) and 'Daily Light' (Bagster), in which texts are grouped in a very helpful way.

In choosing longer passages for daily reading, many follow the lessons as arranged in the Church of

England, especially since the Revised Lectionary has been introduced, taking the Morning Lessons one year and the Evening Lessons the next. This insures the reading of a well-chosen passage from the Old and New Testaments; but the method is defective for private reading for two reasons. First, the Old Testament lessons follow straight on morning and evening, so that any one only reading the morning lesson would skip every other chapter; and secondly, some chapters from the Apocrypha are inserted, and these cannot be taken to be the Word of God.

Many who take up the Bible for the purpose of studying it become members of one of the various Bible-Reading Unions which have sprung into existence during the last few years. Much pains are taken in selecting portions for daily reading in these Unions, and the arrangement thus offered proves very helpful to beginners.<sup>1</sup>

Some begin the Bible every year, and work through it at the rate of so many chapters a-day. As there are nearly 1200 chapters in the Bible, in the proportion of seven in the Old Testament to two in the New, it is plain that this course is not quite adapted to the needs

<sup>1</sup> In the Salvation Army, a selection of the historical books of the Old Testament has been printed for morning reading, and a selection from the remaining half of the Bible for evening reading. The system thus offered has its advantages, and has been made with a certain amount of ingenuity; but it fails to do justice to the high position of the New Testament, which is only read for part of the year, and even then a large part is omitted, and verses are left out from chapters at the caprice of the Army authorities.



of Christian people. The aim of Bible reading, on which enough has been already said, will manifestly be best carried out by the introduction of the main Biblical ingredients into our studies, which will thus include, in due proportion, history, psalm, prophecy.

Certain parts of Scripture are naturally read by most Christians at certain seasons, and some books of the Old Testament are used more frequently for private readings than others. Thus, many have a habit of reading one psalm every day; others read a chapter of the Proverbs every day. Everybody has his favourite books; but we cannot afford to lose any part of the Divine light, and we might usually arrange our Sunday reading so as to make up the deficiencies of our week-days. Moreover, when a family read the Scriptures together at prayers, a good deal may be read which otherwise might be missed in a year's course.

**2. A Method Proposed for Beginners.**—If any one were going to begin Bible reading for the first time in his life without any previous knowledge of the contents of the Scriptures, some such course as the following might be recommended, though it is offered with considerable hesitation. Begin with St. Mark's Gospel. This opens at once with the beginning of our Lord's ministry, and contains sixteen chapters full of vivid details. It might easily be read twice over in a month, and would be understood much better the second time than the first. This plan of taking the same book twice over is generally to be recommended. All students in other lines of work are familiar with it,

and it is one of the best methods of mastering the contents of a book. A man who has read and re-read and prayed over St. Mark has a clear picture of our Lord's life presented to his mind, and has learnt many things which will help him.

It would be well next to take St. Luke, and follow it with the Acts, then St. John's Gospel, and follow it with his Epistles, then St. Matthew and St. James' Epistle. In the Old Testament a man might begin with Genesis, and read it over and over again. It is the foundation of everything. Exodus would follow, then perhaps Deuteronomy, and so straight on to the end of the Kings, other books being postponed, excepting always the Psalms and Proverbs, for which special provision should be made in the scheme.

St. Paul's letters will seem hard at first, and their strength and helpfulness will only gradually dawn upon the soul; but few experienced Christians fail to realise their value, and young Christians need not be afraid of them, for they were chiefly written for the use of young converts. They might be kept for special Sunday reading, together with the writings of the prophets and the other books not provided for above.

All this takes time, perhaps years, but is it not worth while to do the work thoroughly? There is no reason why we should tie ourselves to get through the whole Bible in a year, in fact, it would be far better to spread it over two or three. Generally speaking, the sum of what has been said is, that we should improve the quality of our reading, even at the risk of reducing its quantity.

In closing this chapter, it is as well to reiterate that we must not expect to understand everything at once, but if we keep learning all we can about God's ways from His own Word, and putting it into practice, we shall be sure to grow in knowledge of His will. We may have to leave many things and pass on, but we can do so in the hope that we shall understand better next time. The Bible has its depths and its shallows, and throws light on many things which it does not solve; and in this matter, as in all others, the words come true, 'to him that hath shall more be given.'

Robert Boyle has well said, 'As the knowledge of those facts that are obscure is not necessary, so those others whose sense is necessary to be understood are easy enough, and they are much more numerous than the others. There are shining passages enough in Scripture to light us to heaven, though some unobvious stars of that bright sphere cannot be discerned without the help of a telescope. The frequency of reading lessens the obscurity which, like a mist, seems thicker at a distance than when one enters it.' He points out also, that whilst we are searching into the meaning of obscure passages, we often get light on others; and he encourages us by the remark that 'As sin came into the world by man's listening to the words of the devil, so restoring grace operates chiefly by our listening to the word of God, whether read or heard.' This witness may be confirmed by the testimony of all who have been engaged for any length of time in practical work as teachers, visitors, or missionaries, or in circulating the Scriptures at home or abroad.

‘A man,’ Boyle continues, ‘must not desist from the practice of methodical reading, though (as Naaman dipped himself six times in Jordan without being cured) we should not perceive a sudden and sensible benefit accruing from it. Though at first we be not able to penetrate the sense of some portions of God’s Word, we must at least make our faculties as hospitable to it as we can, and make our memories admit and embrace it till our understandings be grown up to do the like; as Mary kept many sayings in her heart which she understood not.’

## CHAPTER IX.

### USEFUL BOOKS AND STUDIES FOR THE BIBLE READER.

ROBERT BOYLE once said that 'A Christian, to understand the duty of his faith and life, needeth to understand no other book but the Bible;' but, he added, that 'to understand the Bible well, it is ordinarily requisite that a pretty number of other books be understood.'

It is rightly held by every Christian that the Spirit of God is the best illuminator of the understanding; but His help is intended to quicken and purify the faculties, not to be a substitute for them. It is also truly held that the Word of God is the best commentary on itself, as it is the best evidence for itself, and the rules already given are intended to help us to turn it to the best account. But other assistance is not to be despised; and a few hints are offered on this subject before closing.

Augustine remarks in the treatise, so often quoted in the earlier pages of this book, that all kinds of knowledge are useful to the Bible student, whether it be knowledge of music, herbs, stones, classics, history, science, astronomy, athletics, logic.

A child naturally asks his parents or teachers the meaning of hard words or verses, but the parent



cannot solve all difficulties. He needs to be taught, and he must find the needful help as best he can. What are the books he needs to possess and the collateral studies which he has to pursue?

We begin by emphasising the need of a good Marginal Reference Bible, and, as soon as possible, a Paragraph Bible should be added, in order to compare the arrangement of the text; also a Revised Version, in order to compare the translation; an ordinary English Dictionary, such as Chambers', is sometimes needful; and a Concordance, such as Eadie's 'Cruden,' cannot be dispensed with. Some students refuse the help of a Concordance, and trust to their memories or to their powers of searching for the discovery of missing texts; but the time spent in hunting may often be turned to better account, not only by quickly finding the missing passage, but also by tracing the usage of a particular word, which we can so easily do when all the passages where it occurs are placed before our eyes. A Commentary, such as Fausset's 'portable' one, or one of the larger works lately published—*e.g.*, Bishop Ellicott's 'Commentary for English Readers,' or the condensed edition of the 'Speaker's Commentary,' may be added. Here again opinions differ; many refusing to use a Commentary. The best plan is always to search out the meaning of a passage for ourselves, and then (especially if we are preparing to teach others) to confirm, correct, and enlarge our exposition by the use of the condensed experience of others. A Bible Dictionary is the next desideratum; Fausset's 'Biblical Encyclopædia' may be recommended for this purpose.

It gives an account of each book in the Bible, and of the various persons, places, and objects named in it. Even such things as weights and measures have to be studied. Thus, if we are reading Isa. v. 10, 'ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah,' we are compelled to look out the words, 'bath,' 'homer,' and 'ephah,' to know how great or how small is the yield thus specified. Such a book as Angus' 'Bible Handbook' will also be found useful. Many of the historical personages named in the Bible, as Shishak, Sargon, Belshazzar, Pontius Pilate, Gallio, are referred to in ancient literature or in the Eastern monuments and inscriptions lately deciphered. Those we must learn about either from a Bible Dictionary, or from the useful books published by the Christian Knowledge and Religious Tract Societies, as the 'Historical Illustrations of the Old Testament,' by Professor Rawlinson; 'The Origin of Nations,' by the same author; and the 'Bye-Paths,' by various Oriental students. The history of old empires long ago dissolved will thus become fresh to us, and we shall see what a backbone of history runs through the Bible.

The study of ancient manners and customs is made much more easy and pleasant than it used to be, through the publication of books of Eastern travel and research. We can see pictures of the Egyptian taskmaster keeping the tale of the bricks, of the Assyrian potentate leading his captives by the nose, of the anchors cast out from the stern of the vessel, and of numerous other incidents in Eastern, Greek and Roman life, which the Scriptures casually refer to.

A good set of maps will be found most useful. Not only such as are contained in most modern editions of the Bible, but some on a larger scale, which have been published by the Religious Societies. The 'Reduced' Map of Palestine, by the Palestine Exploration Fund, adapted for the study of the Old Testament, is specially to be recommended. These maps will help us to realise the comparative size of countries; they will remind us, for example, how much smaller Palestine is than England; and they will show us the relative positions of places. By their guidance, we note how far Saul had to march to relieve Jabesh Gilead, how far the nobleman had to go between Cana and Capernaum, what distance Bethlehem was from Jerusalem, and Cæsarea from Joppa. Who does not want to know how wide the Jordan was, and how large the Sea of Galilee? Who does not like to trace St. Paul's journeys, especially those which he took on foot, as when travelling from Philippi to Athens?

One practical matter may here be alluded to, namely, that there were several places in Palestine which bore the same name; thus we must distinguish between two Bethlehems, two Carmels, two Meribahs, two Dans, two Red Seas.

In all those things our Bible Dictionary will help us much, and special books, such as Thomson's 'The Land and the Book,' Conder's 'Tent Work in Palestine,' Conybeare and Howson's 'St. Paul,' Murray's 'Guide to the Holy Land,' will be found most useful. The natural history in the East will be illustrated from the same sources, and in such works as that by Dr. Tristram.

There is a period of about 400 years between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. This period is in part sketched prophetically in the 11th of Daniel; but for the filling up, we must look to the Books of the Maccabees, in the Apocrypha, and still more to the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus, who was a contemporary of St. Paul. His *Antiquities*, *History*, and work against Apion, are well worth studying. They give what may be called the current Jewish opinion of the Old Testament; they supply a narrative of Jewish history running parallel with the Gospels and Acts; and they tell us of the awful calamities attending upon the final downfall of Jerusalem.

Ancient religions ought also to be studied. We open our Bible on the words, 'Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth' (Isa. xlv. 1), and ask,—Who and what were Bel and Nebo? by whom were they worshipped? What powers or aspects of God or nature did they represent? This leads us to other interesting questions concerning the religious condition of the outside nations. In what respects did they differ from Israel? and how far is modern heathenism analogous with ancient? Much has been written on this subject by Professor Rawlinson and others; and Bible Dictionaries will usually give some useful information under these heads.

Illustrations from Jewish sources, such as are to be found in the works of Dr. Edersheim, are of special value. We must never forget that we have still living amongst us representatives of the people of whom we



read so much in the Bible, and who are called Hebrews and Israelites in the Old Testament, and Jews in the New; and we may get much light on Scripture by inquiring into those methods of interpreting, and also into their ways of keeping ancient rites. One notable instance may be given: Our Lord was at a Paschal Supper when He instituted the Lord's Supper; consequently a student is led to inquire both into the ancient mode of keeping the Passover and into the way in which it is still kept. It appears that the Paschal rite now in use among the Jews retains many very ancient formularies, some, at least, as old as our Lord's time. Accordingly, when reading that our Lord took bread and said, 'This is My body, which is given for you,' we note that the head of the Jewish family still opens the feast by breaking the bread, and saying, 'This is the bread of affliction, which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt; let all that are hungry enter and eat.' Thus, just as the Paschal bread represented that which was eaten in Egypt, so the bread in the Lord's Supper represents the Lord's body, which was given for us in the 'night much to be remembered,' when the Son of God laid down His life a ransom for many.

In closing this book, the truth must once more be pressed, that 'any part of the Bible, in the most defective translation, to the most ignorant mind, if read with prayer, with reverence, and with all those helps (whatever they may be) which God has given us, will be food for the human soul. You do not want learning, you do not want a knowledge of Greek. Christ worked His



miracles with a little spittle mixed with a little clay, as well as by that awful word which raised the dead. Only believe, only pray, and a mite of knowledge will be more precious in the sight of God than all the mines of Potosi. Often a single word in Scripture, listened to as a voice from God, has converted sinners and brought them to heaven. The Bible read in this spirit, even though in your ignorance you may put upon it a wrong interpretation, which a great scholar would correct, will yet never lead you into any error endangering your salvation.<sup>1</sup>

What is true of the reading of the Bible to find the way of life, is also true of studying the Gospels to learn the path of truth. A well-known divine, when he was beginning life as an Oxford graduate, thought fit to consult the aged and learned Dr. Routh, then President of Magdalen College, as to a course of theological study. 'Aware,' he says, 'that my request was vague, I enlarged for a minute on the matter, chiefly in order to give him time to adjust his thoughts before making reply. He inquired what I had read. Pearson (on the Creed) and Eusebius (Church History) carefully. The gravity which by this time his features had assumed was very striking. He lay back in his chair, his head sank forward on his chest, and he looked like one absorbed in thought. "Yes, I think, sir," said he, after a long pause, "were I you, sir, I would first of all read the Gospel according to St. Matthew." Here he paused. "And after I had read St. Matthew, I would,

<sup>1</sup> 'Some Last Words of the Rev. W. Sewell, D.D.' Rivingtons, 1876.

were I you, sir, go on to read the Gospel according to St. Mark." I looked at him anxiously, to see whether he was serious. One glance was enough. He was giving me (at a slow rate) the outline of my future course. "I think, sir, when I had read the Gospel according to St. Mark, I would go on, sir, to the Gospel according to St. Luke." Another pause, as if the reverend speaker were reconsidering the matter. "Well, sir, when I had read these three Gospels, I would go on, certainly, to read the Gospel according to St. John." For an instant,' says the narrator, 'I had felt an inclination to laugh; but by this time a very different set of feelings came over me. Here was a theologian of ninety-one, who, after surveying the entire field of sacred science, had come back to the point he had started from, and had nothing better to advise me to read than the Gospels.'

'Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'



It is a good interior  
practice to make death  
a light to live by;  
in other words, doing  
every thing as we shall  
wish to have done it  
when we come to die!

H. W. Haber.

<sup>from Saint -</sup>  
Br. M. M. Kurov

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